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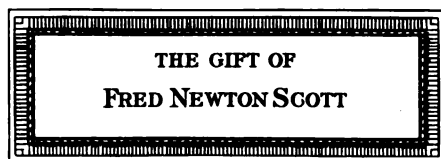
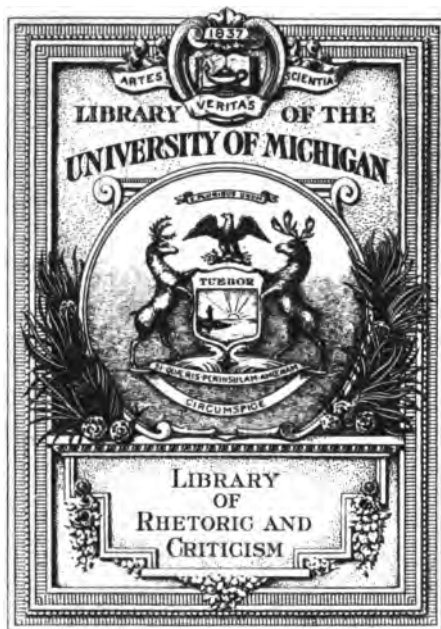
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AMERICA IN LITERATURE

GEORGE E. WOODBERRY



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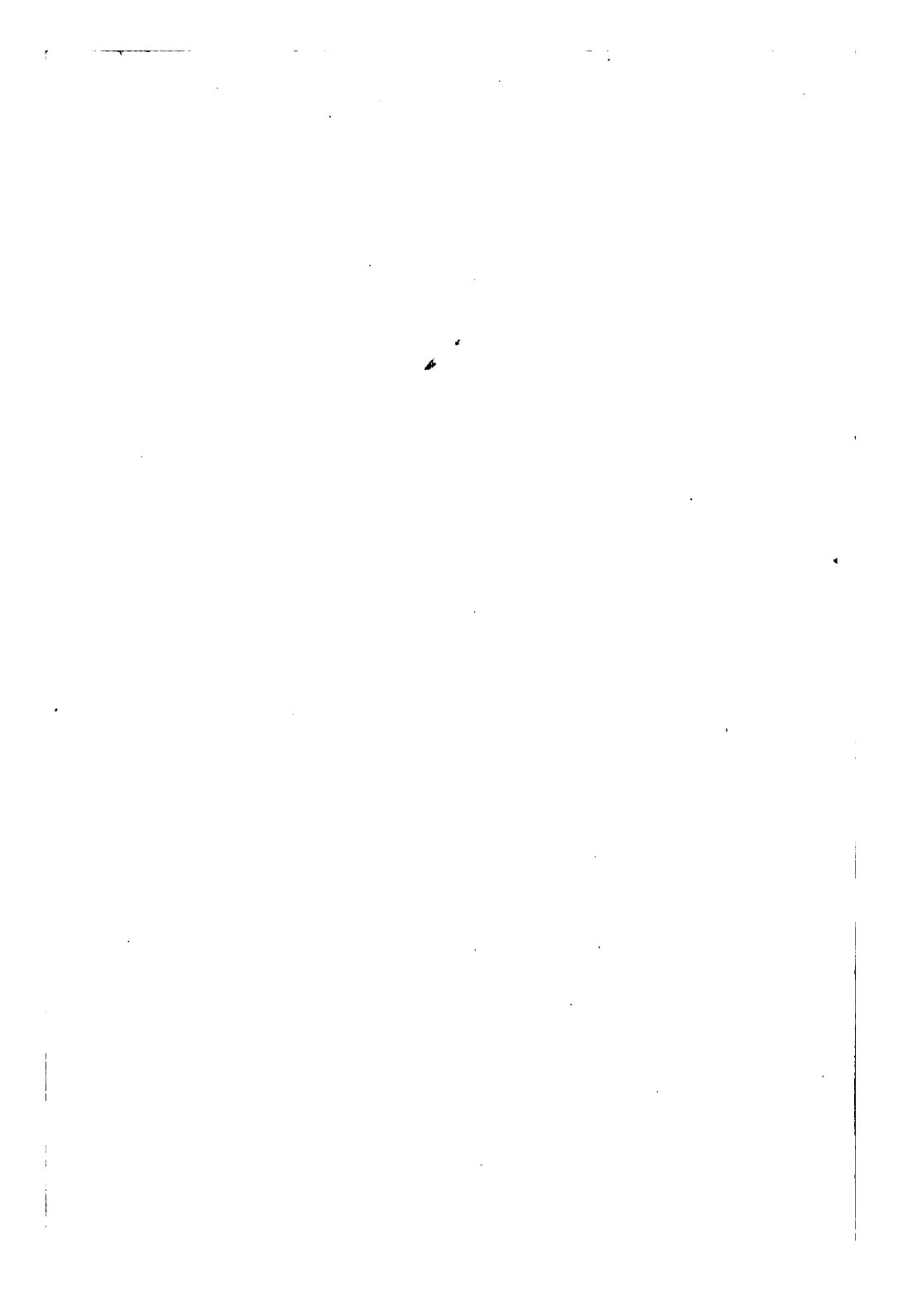
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AMERICA IN LITERATURE

BY

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

Professor of Comparative Literature
Columbia University



NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
MCMIII



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Published November, 1903.

06-26-284473

NOTE

The papers in this volume originally appeared
in *Harper's Magazine* and in *Harper's Weekly*.

G. E. W.

BEVERLY, MASS., Sept. 8, 1903

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THE BEGINNINGS

EVERYTHING begins in the middle—to adapt a wise saying—like an epic poem. That is the central truth of human perspective. Open history where you will, and there are always men streaming over the mountains or the sea from some horizon, bringing with them arms and cattle, battle-songs and prayers, and an imaginary world; their best treasure is ever the seed of some last year's harvest. Colonialism is a word too often used to disparage the thing; it is the natural condition of the outposts of man's spread over the earth;

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the wave, as it breaks on new shores, is salt with time. England was colonized, and Greece and India. So our ancestors, the first Americans, brought with them the past as well as the future to this land. It is not often that books make an important item in the cargo of an emigrant ship. The mother-tongue is brought, and in it is the great sap of thought, aspiration, and resolve that shall feed institutions of Church and State as they arise; but the book-language is, in the main, left at home; it is the mouth-language, where literature is in the making, that will be used on the new soil.

The pure literary influence in all our early colonies, the impact of the book-past of England, was slightest at the South and strengthened with the north-ing. In Virginia, generally, the first estates were naturally as innocent of

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learning as Osbaldistone Hall; there was a countrified indifference to it befitting a young squirarchy, a touch of contempt felt with old-fashioned English frankness, even a dull hatred of enlightenment, as when the Governor thanked God that there were "no free schools nor printing," and hoped there would be none for a hundred years. "God keep us from both!" he cried. At the other focus of the settlement, in New England, a different state of affairs prevailed, though there, too, the pure literary influence was narrowly limited. But as in the dawn of England Beowulf had come in the long Danish boats, and many an exodus has gone out with one great book which was like brain and blood to the little race, there on Massachusetts Bay a book had come with the people; and every ship, loaded with

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the twenty thousand souls of the first emigration, brought it—the book that has oftenest crossed the sea of all the books of men—the Bible. It is the greatest English book, and in this small folk of English stock it found a human vehicle of power equal to its greatness.

This nest of Puritans is commonly thought of as deficient in that large part of the human genius which is enlightened by letters,—as unimaginative; and because they did not flower out with polite literature they are said to be unliterary. Yet the Puritan line in England was constituted of Spenser, Milton, and Bunyan, the three most imaginative minds of their generations for a century of English life; though it should be observed that in these three instances the imagination moved in moulds already prepared for it. The Puritans, being

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of the stock they were, could not but be imaginative, romantic, intense, in vision, emotion, and idea; they were high-charged with all this energy; but the channels were prepared for it, and they found their literature in the Bible. If they required songs of praise, they "rolled the hymn to wintry skies"; if they sought expression for humiliation, or desired to illustrate their fortunes or passions, their sins, trials, and deliverances, there was the typical narrative and drama of human life, as they knew it, in the Scriptures; they turned to their one book, and more frequently, as their descendants now turn to whole libraries, and found in it the mirror of life. The Bible was, indeed, to use the language of to-day, like a great literary trust; it supplied all wants and forbade competition. Such a book, when it takes hold of

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a people so completely and intimately and fills the measure of their spiritual energy, needs to recede before men will again attempt originally the task it performs, as Shakespeare must recede before dramatic imagination can flourish with equal new power; for, though books are not seldom the seeds of revolution, a great book is normally a powerful conservative force, a true bond of national life.

It is, however, wide of the mark to describe a people to whom the Old Testament was more thoroughly known than Homer to the young Greeks and the New Testament more familiar than Victor Hugo to young France as an unlettered people. If it be the function of literature to lift the thoughts of men, to educate the emotions, to shape character towards ideal ends, to exalt and to

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console, and always to minister to the spirit in its walk on earth, the Bible discharged this office in the early generation of the New England settlements with an adequacy, a constancy, a penetration, a completeness of efficacy such as is hardly to be paralleled in history. It was their rubric of prayer, their lyric of praise, the parable of their morality, and they adapted it to be the epic of their growing state where they, too, were a chosen people of God planted in the wilderness. This was its popular significance.

It bred a learned and scholarly clergy besides, vast producers of sermons, controversial tractates and speculative treatises in theology, such that, if the book had been secular, the age would have been named Alexandrian; and it enforced that respect for learning and the literary

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✓ faculty which has never ceased in that region, as it also made the people a lettered people by the mere necessity that it should be read by all, just as the right to vote is making the nation at large now a lettered nation. It may seem like reheating old fires to discourse in this way of the place of the Bible in our beginnings; but it is essential for a true comprehension of our early life and letters, and the relationship between them, to see in these first generations not a dull, darkened, unimaginative folk, but, in a true sense, one of the most literary states that ever existed, having its most passionate and intense life in a book as simple and significant to it as the Koran to Islam, and as much richer than the Koran in art and truth as the Christian life exceeds the Moslem faith. To think of the old sermons and treatises as the

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first American literature is like speaking of the commentaries on Shakespeare and omitting the poet. The Bible was the book in which the first Americans found what literature has to give to the hearts of the people, and in it they had their full and overflowing literary, nor should one hesitate to say their artistic life.

And what was this life that the Puritans led with this book for their brain and heart? We have their prayers, sweet and solemn in the cadences better known to us now in the English Prayer-book; we have the letters of their wives, like Mrs. Winthrop's, mingling human affection with divine love, as if these New England mothers were also nuns of Christ's cloister; we have their sermons, now terse and tense and studded with learning better known to us in Milton, now with the flowing amplitude and elo-

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quence that to our ears is Taylor's, or with the vivid realism of vision that to our eyes is Bunyan's limning on the darkness; we have the words, but the light to read them by is gone.

The clergy themselves are stiff to us as their portraits—all wig and gown and wooden smiles—and when we think of them it is most often as fire-breathing dragons, perhaps; yet they were, as is well known, men of great power of character, with some of what seem the lost graces of greatness, immense intellectual vigor, moral authority, dignity, the scholar's refinement, sanctity even; and, if we are to judge by what their friends said of them — and how else shall we judge?— in some few, at least, all the poison of human nature had gone out of them into their creed and left only angelic sweetness in their souls; nor is it only in Pu-

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ritanism that such a miracle has been wrought, but it is found in intense religious life elsewhere. The people who sat under their teaching are also far away in the past, so marked in their double consciousness, as it were; on the one side, absorbed in practical affairs, fighting, exploring, debating, building all things new; on the other, absorbed in spiritual self-scrutiny, despairing, hoping, doubting; so sure in every touch on this world with axe and plough and gun, yet within living in the world to come, with the dreadful uncertainty which world it would be. One sees the little towns of low houses dotting the coast, the clearings landward, the few boats by the shore, the deep woods all about, only the trail or the river for roads—a wilderness silent and dark, the summer heat on the sparse corn, the winter drift over

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all; peril always near, subsistence often uncertain, a hard and trying physical life. Yet here, as always where life is great, spiritual life was the one reality in the midst of this stubborn fact. We cannot see clearly into that darkness. Perhaps some echoes of that life may come to us in Scott's Covenanters, or in the romance in which Hawthorne transposed its music, but it comes faintly; only the imagination would be equal to telling us, and the secret is lost. The heart of the Puritan is a closed book. The sermons, the diaries, the portraits, the so-called colonial literature, will not interpret it; they are as much in the twilight of antiquity as Anglo-Saxon chronicles and riddles; they are the grave-clothes left behind, but the spirit, our brother and master, is gone.

The silence that has fallen on the

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Puritan imagination, meditation, and passion is, nevertheless, not an abnormal thing. Something similar is always happening in our experience. As life rises to expression in us, and among men at large to whom literature is a living power, energy of thought and emotion is draughted off through the established hereditary mediums, through Shakespeare, Scott, Dickens, and leaves no original trace of itself. The life which is led through literature—and it is always large in a reading people such as ours—has its superficial swirl and froth like the ocean, its thousand-tongued clamor of books of the hour; but its deep currents are silent, as the influence of the writers just named with myriads of thousands of annual readers reminds us. The Bible is still the great Gulf Stream in the literary consciousness of English

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people, and their life is daily expressed through its language and imagery and ideals, the actual life of each day from matins to vespers; but it is a life on which, as of old, silence falls at the day's end. It leaves no original record of itself in new literature, just as the vitality of impulse, sympathy, and world-hope, which expresses itself in us by an appropriation of the genius of Burns, Shelley, or Tennyson to our own uses, burns out without shaping new moulds for others.

There is an original expression which creates literature and is individualistic; but it is rather in this sympathetic expression, which appropriates literature and is social, that popular literary life lies, and the latter may flourish abundantly when the former seems dead. Such was the case with the Puritan genius; it used literature of the highest

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quality, but it produced none, realizing, it is curious to observe, the literary ideal of Plato's Republic, where a traditional, conservative, and sacred poetry was to reign, excluding any new individual expression.

The chief end of literature as the expression of life being thus anticipated and provided for, and the main stream of intense experience, out of which the creative impulse comes, being directed through these hereditary Scriptural channels, there was left for the new American speech only the less essential things, the fringes of this life in its higher spiritual manifestation, and especially the whole of the lower plane of material affairs, the contemporaneous record of events, and, in a word, the environment.

Here, too, the religious life sent its rays from the centre out into the mortal

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field. There was an aura, for example, of special providences that filled the whole heaven round the settlements, not with the aloofness of miracle, but with a homely, hand-to-mouth nearness, so that the gray goose which John Dane shot on Ipswich River could not fall from the sky for his dinner except as the sparrow falls. No doubt the goose was as real to him as Elijah's ravens; and such a trifle best illustrates the omnipresent nearness of Providence in the people's thought, as close with the helping hand as with the all-seeing eye. There was by night another aura, too, of darkness from the pit, that made the Essex woods gloom and creak with the Sabbath of witches, and gave Salem its nightmare year. The nearness of the devil was as natural as the nearness of God; and if lost men in the woods or on

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the sea or on ice-floes take their hunter's luck as providential, as they commonly do, it is as instinctive in human nature to feel in the sense of peril in the wilderness, in the slightness of life-shelter there, some diabolism in the shades. But while remarkable providences and witchcraft delusions are the most sensational phases of the record of our early annalists and diarists, the best part of it lies in its realistic story of the life of the times, its anecdotes of personal adventure, Indian captivity and escape, explorations, voyages on the rivers and coastwise, the shipwrecks, like that marvellous one of Thacher and Avery, the surprising deliverances, all the chronicle of pioneer life.

Here the old English speech, still smacking of the times of great Elizabeth, hardens the knotty story with

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rude oaken strength, and discloses the individual primitive force, the daring, the resource and resolution of the transplanted stock, with picturesque and deep-bitten realism in every scene. It is primarily a literature of character in the raw state that thus sprang up, with adventure as its mode of presentation; it is the stamped life of the time, that has proved more permanent because it was written down, but it is only fragments of that life whose living speech was so much more abundant and made the topic of secular interest round every meeting-house, in all the taverns, and by the great, blazing hearths of the whole country-side.

Historians, in their turn, took up the tale and composed the early annals of the New World, always with a pride in the land, and some thought of it as an

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oasis of God in His dealing with mankind, a sense that it was a place of deliverance, their very own, God's grant, the King's realm rather by legal courtesy than of right; the divine right, indeed, was in themselves, not in the King. The narrative itself is meagre and concerns simple things; but the spirit of it contained the political future. So, life beginning now to be long in the land, and the scattered settlements to multiply and knit together with a broader inclusion of common mundane interests, commerce springing up and spreading southward to the West Indies, and wealth from home produce and foreign exchange making rich citizens in the principal towns, that movement of secularization set in which was the result of this growing diversity in employment, outlook, and ambition, and the world

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was more and more, and its problems assertive of their privilege to be first and its ways of their right to be commanding. There was a fading-out of the old fervor, a reactionary wave of the great awakening in religion, but the lessening oscillations showed that the element of religion had shrunk again to be only a part of life, and not the leading public part now. The clergy and the magistrates were less in alliance, as one power of the State, and the former had lost place. They had left a few memorable names for landmarks — Eliot, Cotton Mather, Edwards, among the chief—and some folios, the *Magnalia* the first; but the Puritan age was gone, the land was settled, the main interest of the people was secular, questions of trade and taxes came forward, and, foremost of all, the question of government. If literature

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in the first century was mainly one that came home to men's bosoms, it was now one that came home to their business. Perhaps the illustrative moment of the change is best arrested in Franklin's boyhood, when he stayed at home from evening meeting on the Sabbath, not without some misgiving, because he could make a better use of his time in study.

The founding of a greater State than the Puritan commonwealth was now in hand, and the basis of it was broader in the roots of the nation among the dispersed colonies. The general complexion of the literature which set forth the growth of the environment of the new American life was the same in all the colonies; a similar record would be made later in the winning of the West, experience vividly felt being transcribed in the words of those who did or closely

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observed the deeds; and in these generations of the first conquest of the wilderness, Colonel Norwood's narrative in the South was of the same stripe as such memorabilia were to be everywhere. Yet in the North, owing to the greater strength of the literary habit, a certain primacy remained in importance and fulness. In the new political development this would no longer be the case. The great documents of this literature, the Declaration and the Constitution, were written to the southward, though they were the product of the general sense of all; and round about them the writings of Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Paine, Otis, and their fellows clustered as a literature of interpretation of the great ideas they embodied, in a manner somewhat analogous to the way in which the sermons of the old clergy gath-

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ered around the Scriptures. Oratory had sprung up in the general forum, and belonged, like the newspapers, to the troubled times; and having great ideas to feed on, and being electrified by passion, it began that remarkable career which had its climax in Webster and only died in Phillips.

The political literature of the Revolution was the great achievement of the age in the intellectual sphere; and it was so great as it was because from the hour when its immortal classic, the Declaration, was read by Washington's order at the head of every regiment, the practical energy of the new-born nation went into it completely, engaged in the labor of applying to life those ideas of free government which had become the absorbing thought and emotion of the people, both in battle and in council;

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and, moreover, not only were the ideas themselves of commanding power, but they were set forth in words and bodied forth in institutions by great characters. Washington's Farewell Address is rightly reckoned a monument of the time scarcely inferior in dignity to the two instruments that preceded it; and one great book of government, *The Federalist*, summed up the broad national thought.

In these writings, distinctively, was the literary outburst of life, as it then sought expression in language, imagery, and ideas of public liberty, as directly, pervasively, and energetically as in the Puritan commonwealth in the earlier age it had found utterance in the language and imagery and ideals of the Bible; it was here as thoroughly political as it had before been religious; but here, too, it is life expressed in literature, though now

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the form is original and indigenous. The first great contact of life and letters in America was through religious passion in inherited forms of speech; the second great contact was through political passion, and created a new literature for itself; between the two lay the literature, always more or less in evidence, describing the environment of life and its events realistically, or summing it up in history or annals. Such, in few words, is the story of the interaction of American life and letters in their vital connection in the colonial times.

Is it too brief a tale, too scant in names and titles, too little diversified? Does it slight academic definitions, preconceptions of the bibliographer and antiquarian, the received tradition of our colonial literature which has so swelled in bulk by the labors of our literary his-

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torians in the last thirty years of local research? What of *The Day of Doom*, *The New England Primer*, and *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and the other wooden worthies of our Noah's Ark, survivors from the Flood, archaic idols? These are relics of a literary fetichism, together with Franklin's *Autobiography* and Edwards's *On the Freedom of the Will*, except that the great character of Franklin still pleads for one, and the great intellect of Edwards for the other with a few. They do not belong with the books that become the classics of a nation. They are not necessarily remembered. Their being mentioned at all denotes the scarcity of colonial books that can be brought, even by charity, under the head of literature in its polite sense.

The contact of the colonists with ele-

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gant letters, as imported from England, was also inconspicuous. It is true that William Hathorne, the ancestor of the romancer, brought over Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, and the thought of that stern captain and orator of the Puritan assembly reading the lore of the shepherd - knights, of love in the far different wild of Salem, fills one with amazement; but the fact is significant of the kind of touch with England then maintained, and not through the scholars of the old-home Cambridge alone. Spenser was also known, and *Du Bartas*; and, as time went on, the Puritan literature came over—Milton and Bunyan, and then Cowper, the characteristic books to be found in New England homes at the end of the period, and long afterwards the familiar books of the house there. But those who felt the literary

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impulse from the imported writings were few and achieved nothing; gather up their slender compositions as we may with pious care, it is only for reburial. The fertilizing power of such books was long delayed, so long, in fact, as to bring the eighteenth century nearer to us than it is to Englishmen; for Addison, who first was felt in Irving, is still perceptible in Curtis, and Holmes hardly escaped being one of Pope's imitators. It is only one hidebound in academic prejudice who could treat such a rill of Parnassus as imitative colonial verse, as a matter of any importance in our literature. The people were a prose people, who had both their practical and spiritual life in prose; what was to them the substance of poetry in their lives was clothed in prose, however exalted with the rhythm of deep, natural feeling; their very hymns

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had lost the sense of poetic form. They had, in truth, forgotten poetry; the perception of it as a noble and exquisite form of language had gone from them, nor did it come back till Bryant recaptured, for the first time, its grander lines at the same time that he gave landscape to the virgin horizons of his country.

Slowly, however, the ground was prepared for literature in the narrower sense; it was the last of the great natural functions of a civilized State to revive on the new soil; even now it is only with reservations that it can be said to have reached the dignity of a distinct profession among us. The clergy and the statesmen used it only as a tool in their own crafts for ulterior ends; they did not value it as an art capable of products that belong only to itself. There was

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no place for the man of letters in the social arrangement; there was no market for his wares in the social economy; religious and political ideals were supplied in abundance, and no need was felt for other ideals; and, as for entertainment, it was a hard-working world, this young America, fully employed with its material tasks in subduing the soil, advancing the border, establishing trade, manufacture, and commerce, founding institutions, planting the State in all ways. Communication spread through the colonies, which drew together, but this communication was ecclesiastical, mercantile, political; and, in fact, it was scientific before it was literary. The first class, too, that developed wealth was a burgher commercial class, whose indulgence was in articles of costly merchandise, in luxuries of the house and

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dress, in comfortable living; the old Tory class, materialized with new riches and interested in the old order as one in which they were substantial citizens. Letters have seldom flourished in such an environment. It was not until the prosperous times after the Revolution, in a wider and more varied world, that signs of literary consciousness can be discerned. In the newspapers there began to be indications of literary ambition, and in the publications that were late fruits of the periodical movement in the English eighteenth century there were signs of literary breeding, but the minds of the contributors fed on the husks of a foreign taste. The presses of Philadelphia and Wilmington had reprinted English books, and English radicalism was early welcomed and had a living contemporary impetus; Mary

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Wollstonecraft's books, for example, were issued and had influence.

There was a rapid expansion in the field of books; readers increased in numbers; a demand arose for works current in the mother-country, as well as for standard authors of the closing century. Perhaps the clearest sign of the coming revival was to be seen in the first public libraries, called social libraries, that sprang up in the New England coast towns and were considerable collections for general use. Their catalogues show what books were read; and, while they contain a large proportion of religious works, manuals of counsel for parents and youth, serious meditative discourses, and the like, they are also filled with travel, history, the science of those days, the English classic poets and prose writers, and are not destitute of fiction

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and plays. They reveal the existence of a distinct literary attention in the community, which was in readiness for the native writers; or, if they failed to arise, these little libraries would breed them. What was true of the neighborhood of Boston was also the case in other local centres as far south as Philadelphia at least; the reading public, interested in contemporary books and also familiarized with the traditional higher forms of the literary art—essay, tale, and poem—had come.

The first appearance of an American spirit, indigenous and of the soil, would naturally be found in that folk-literature that comes with printer's ink instead of with the bardic harp, the broadside of ballad and news; but of this there was only a small product, chiefly remembered by the Song of Braddock's

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Men, the ballad of Nathan Hale, Yankee Doodle, and the like; and no popular writer rose out of it. The first name distinctly literary was that of Philip Freneau, whose poems, though following the manner of the contemporary English school, had American color in their subjects; while he possessed literary feeling, he had no distinction except as a solitary figure, and he made no wide appeal to his countrymen. Charles Brockden Brown, the earliest American novelist, was of a much stronger native fibre. He had an original impulse, springing from his times and his environment, and his novels were localized on the soil. In manner he, too, adopted the current English fashion, and yet not slavishly, but with a purpose to reform and advance it, and put it to new uses. He made a conscious attempt to substi-

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tute realism for romantic supernaturalism, and turned from the Gothic castle and the ghost to quasi - scientific phenomena, such as ventriloquism, somnambulism, and clairvoyance, for the magic of his mystery, and to the contemporary things of America, such as the Indian and the yellow-fever pest in New York, for the substance of his physical background. He remained, however, too closely attached to the pseudo-romantic in character, and was too much interested in the ideas of Godwin's English radicalism, to be able to break out a plain human story from the shell of life in the colonies, as Miss Edgeworth did in the case of Irish and Scott in the case of Scotch life. He was far from being a genius in fiction; but American traits, things, and contemporary interests are strongly marked in

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his curiously composite tales; the ferment of new literary life is in them. In the elder Richard Henry Dana, who held a similar position in the New England centre, poetry and fiction were blended, but neither element disclosed American originality except by some modification of his English exemplars in respect to the setting of his works. The character, the passion, the situation are still of the pseudo-romantic English school, which was the tap-root of Byronism and in Dana sent out a wandering shoot overseas. But Freneau, Brown, and Dana, though their works are long forgotten, illustrate the sort of literary creation that went on in the opening of the New World to the poetic and romantic imagination of its own sons. They were pioneers of the literary art and profession, with habits Eng-

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lish-bred, but working in the home field.

These were our beginnings in the life which a people leads through books, those works which it inherits from the fathers and those which it creates out of itself. This life lay almost exclusively in the religious, political, and historic fields; it was only with the generation born after the Revolution that literature was practised as a fine art in an independent and original way. But the colonial generations had done their work, and the time was ripe for complete life on the scale of Western civilization. They had planted religion, liberty, and letters, which are the three estates of a great nation; and literature had been their instrument in each phase of the triple task.

THE KNICKERBOCKER ERA

FATHER KNICKERBOCKER was the first literary creation of our country. The little old man in the old black coat and cocked hat, who strayed from his lodgings and was near being advertised for by the police of that day, and who left behind him the curious history that was to be sold for his debts, was destined by the spirit of humor to be the eldest child of our originality, and he proved his title-deeds of true birth so well that the estate of New York proudly received and owned him and gave him the island and river realm and took

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to itself and its belongings the name of its droll saint. He was a myth, like all our types; for American genius has never yet created a man or woman so much of nature's stamp as to live in our memories and affections like one of ourselves, as Uncle Toby or Hamlet or Pickwick does; but, like all true myths, he had a root in the soil. It was characteristically American, premonitory of a land of many races, that this Dutch grotesque, so pure in his racial strain as to incorporate all the old traditional blood in his small figure, should have issued from a brain half Scotch and half English, the first-born of Irving's invention; but Dietrich Knickerbocker could hardly have seen himself with Dutch eyes, and so in this first instance it was the blending of the stocks that gave literary consciousness and set up the

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reactions that breed imagination and humor.

The city, nevertheless, was pure-blooded in these early days, at least by comparison with its later conglomerations; and it was, in fact, the expression of local pride and race dignity in Dr. Mitchell's Picture of New York that gave occasion to the graceless half-breed, this young Irving, to amuse himself and the town with its author's vanity and heaviness. The Knickerbocker History was the sort of broad travesty that the victim calls coarse caricature, and it might not have survived so long and so acceptably if the victorious English race had not grown with the city and continued the local temper that most enjoyed the humor. Certainly the old Dutch town cannot be credited with producing Irving, except on the theory of opposites; it furnished

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the material, but the hand that wrought it was English by blood and breeding. It belonged to the situation that the observer should be of a different kind; the subject gained by his aloofness from it. If one to the manner born could never have seen the broad humor of it, neither could he have touched the Knickerbocker world with that luminous sentiment which by another smile of fortune made Rip Van Winkle immortal. Individuality has played an uncommonly large part in our literature, and its part is always greater than is usually allowed; and, after all, Irving created this past; he was the medium through whom it became visible; and it still lies there in the atmosphere of his genius not in the crudity of its own by-gone fact. He found the old Dutch life there in the city and up and down the waterways in his

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cheerful, tender, and warm youth; he laughed at it and smiled on it; and what it was to his imagination it came to be as reality almost historic to his countrymen.

It is all a colonial dream, like Longfellow's *Acadie*, and the witchery of literature has changed it into an horizon of our past, where it broods forever over the reaches of the Hudson northward. Hawthorne's Puritan past is not more evasive; but a broad difference is marked by the contrast of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*; the absence of the moral element is felt in the latter; and a grosser habit of life, creature comfort, a harmless but unspiritual superstition, a human warmth, a social comradery, are prominent in Irving's lucubrations, and these are traits of the community ripened and

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sweetened in him. Irving must have been a charming boy, and in his young days he laid the bases of his life in good cheer, happy cordiality, the amiableness of a sensitive and pleasurable temperament, which he developed in the kindly and hospitable homes of the city. He was all his days a social creature, and loved society, masculine and feminine; and going from New York to a long European experience of social life he returned to be one of the finest types of a man so bred, fit to be one of the historic literary figures of a commercial and cosmopolitan city.

Irving, however, thorough American of his day though he was, bore but little relation to the life of the nation. He was indebted to his country for some impulses of his genius and much material which he reworked into books; but

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he gave more than he received. Our early literary poverty is illustrated by the gifts he brought. He was a pioneer of letters, but our literary pioneers instead of penetrating further into the virgin wilderness had to hark back to the old lands and come again with piratical treasures; and in this he was only the first of a long line of continental adventurers. Much of American literary experience, which comes to us in our few classics, was gained on foreign soil; and, in fact, it must be acknowledged that, like some young wines, American genius has been much improved by crossing the seas. Irving was the first example. Commerce naturally leads to travel, and he went out as a man in trade to stay a few months. He remained seventeen years. It was not merely that he received there an aristocratic social train-

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ing and opportunity peculiarly adapted to ripen his graces—and the graces of his style and nature are essentially social graces—but subjects were given to him and his sympathies drawn out and loosed by both his English and his Spanish residences.

Sentiment and romance were more to him than humor, and grew to be more with years; and in the old lands his mind found that to cling to and clamber over which otherwise might not have come to support his wandering and sympathetic mood. Genius he had, the nature and the faculty of an imaginative writer; what he needed was not power but opportunity; and at every new chance of life he answered to the time and place and succeeded. He alone of men not English-born has added fascination to English shrines, and given

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them that new light that the poet brings; and he has linked his name indissolubly for all English-reading people with the Alhambra and Granada. It was because of his American birth that he wrote of Columbus, and perhaps some subtle imaginative sympathy always underlies the attraction of Spain, which is so marked, for American writers; but it was not unfitting that in his volumes of travel sketches the romantic after-glow of Spain should bloom in our western sky. By such works, more than by his English sketches, which will always seem an undivided part of English literature, he gave to our early literature a romantic horizon, though found in the history and legend of a far country, which it had hitherto lacked; and it is a striking phenomenon to find our writers, on whom the skies shut down

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round the shores of the New World, lifting up and opening out these prospects into the picturesque distance of earth's space and the romantic remoteness of history, as if our literary genius were gone on a voyage of discovery. It shows the expansion of the national mind, the cessation of the exiguous exile of the colonial days, the beginning of our reunion with the nations of the world, which still goes on; and in this reunion, necessary for our oneness with man, literature led the way in these romantic affections of our first travelled man of letters, Irving, in whose wake the others followed.

The third point of contact that Irving's genius found with the larger life of his native land was in the realm of exploration. It was long now since the human tide had swept from the shores and inlets of the sea through the great

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forests and down the Appalachian slopes and broken in broad streams upon the open prairie; and the adventurers were already threading the thin trails of the desert and high mountain solitudes. Here was the new and unused material of national experience, and to this day its riches have gone to waste, so far as literature is concerned. Irving, however, on his late return home, was struck with admiration at the vast progress made into the Western wilderness, and he perceived its literary utility. A journey he made in the Southwest gave him the near view he always needed to stimulate his descriptive power and to wake his eye for incident, and in his *Tour of the Prairies* he wrote down our best literary impression of the actual scene. It was no more than a traveller's journal, but it remains unique and interesting.

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Unfortunately his temperament was not such as to respond with creative power over this new world. The theme did not pass beyond the realistic stage of treatment, just as in the case of Poe, who also saw the subject in his Julius Rodman, though Irving's handling far surpasses Poe's by virtue of his personality and the charm that radiates from it. Even less in Astoria and Captain Bonneville did Irving win the heart from this Western mystery. The matter remained crude, fine in its facts, but unimaginative, unwakened, unbreathed on by the spirit that giveth life. The Americanization of the wilderness was going on, but its literature was like that of the settlement of the coast in the earlier time, a mass of contemporary, rudely recorded experience and memory; the routes of the fur-traders still led only

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to and from the Astor counting-room; Irving observed and noted, and made a book or two of the discovery, but his imagination was not of the sort to draw out the romance of it, for it had no element of the past, and the past was his mother Muse.

It was the second writer who sprang up in the old city of New York, Cooper, who was to create in this broad field of national expansion, though in narrowly limited ways far from adequate to the vast sweep and variety of its immensely efficient life. Cooper subdued for literature the forest and the sea and brought them into the mind's domain, but it was rather as parts of nature than as the theatre of men. The power of the scenery is most felt in his work and prevails over the human element. It is a just perspective, nevertheless, and

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true to the emotion of the time and place.

He began very naturally. His first interest was in character, the personality that he immortalized as Harvey Birch, and in the events so near in memory to him and so close in locality, the Revolutionary scene as it was in Westchester; and out of these he made a historical tale that was the corner-stone of a great literary reputation. But it was not long before he went deeper into the sources of his own experience for theme and feeling, and his most characteristic work was a part of himself, of that self which had shared most widely in the novel and broad experience of American life. He had grown up under the shadow of the wild forest and in the sunlight of the lake and clearing, in close contact with nature all his boyish days; famil-

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ilarity with the forest gave him at a later time of youth the open secret of the sea, so much the same are the ground tones of nature; and ceasing to be midshipman and lieutenant, he had, so to speak, made the rounds of the great elements in whose primitive simplicities he set his story. There was something of the artist in him, but nothing of the poet, and he felt the impressiveness of nature, its oppositions to society and law and man, as our common humanity feels them, not in Wordsworthian aloofness and spiritual interpretation, but as a real presence, an actuality, a thing of fact. His popular vogue in France was prepared for him by a pre-established harmony between the eloquent French dream of the life of nature and his narrative where nature still brooded as in a lake, so near was he to her presence; but

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what was to the foreigner a new Arcadia only, an illusion of the heart, was to him a living world.

Being a novelist, he concentrated this vague emotion of the free majesty of nature in a character of fiction, Leatherstocking, one of the great, original types of romanticism in the past century. Yet Leatherstocking, like Knickerbocker, is pure myth, with a root in the soil, too, an incarnation of the forest-border, a blend of nature and man in a human form, thoroughly vitalized, impressive, emotional, an ideal figure. It is characteristic of our greater writers, even our humorists, to be nearer to the American idea than to anything concretely American. The infusion of grandeur—the word is not inappropriate—in Cooper's work is what gives it distinction, and most in its most imaginative por-

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tions. It is true that he invented the sea-novel, as was not unnatural, in view of his experience of our maritime life and of the great place of that life in our national activity and consciousness; and he used colonial, revolutionary, and border history out of our stores to weave incident, plot, and scene; but it is not these things that make him national, but the American breath that fills his works; and where this is least the scene grows mean, petty, awkward, inept, feeble; and where it is greatest there the life is found—in *The Pathfinder*, *The Deerslayer*, *The Prairie*. He was abroad, like Irving, for many years, and gained thereby — perhaps through contrast and detachment merely — a truer conception and deeper admiration of democracy, its principles, aims, and energies; but he was national where Ir-

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ving was international, and if Irving, in his literary relation to his country, is rather thought of as an influence upon it, Cooper was its effluence, the American spirit in forest, sea, and man taking on form, feature, and emotion first in his world, sentimentalized, idealized, pictorial though it was. The best that literature achieves is a new dream; this was the first dream of American life, broad and various, in its great new solitudes of sea and land.

Irving and Cooper were the two writers of the first rank in our letters. Strangely contrasted in their careers as well as in character, and curiously overlapping in their experience and writings, neither of them was a true product of the city, or bound to it, except in ephemeral ways. The one beloved, the other hated, their reputations were alike national.

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American literature, which was in no sense provincial, began with them. A third great name, which is as large in tradition, at least, is linked with theirs in the city's literary fame. Bryant was a New - Englander by birth, and remained one in nature all his life, but his name lingers where he had his career, in the metropolis. It belongs to a city in which of all the cities of the earth nativity is the least seal of citizenship to appropriate justly the works of its foster-children; and Bryant illustrates, as a New-Yorker, its assimilation of the sons of all the nation. In the Niagara of life that forever pours into its vast human basin, there has been a constant current from New England, important in the city's life and control. What Beecher was in religion, Bryant was in poetry—an infusion of highly liberalized moral

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power. Irving said there was nothing Puritanical in himself, nor had he any sympathy with Puritanism; and Cooper hated the New England type, though he was pietistic to an uncommon degree. Between them they represented the temper of the New York community on both its worldly and evangelical side. Bryant, however, offers a sharp contrast to them, for he had precisely that depth of moral power that was his heritage from Puritanism, and marked in the next generation the literature of New England, setting it off from the literature of New York. Depth, penetration, intensity, all that religious fervor fosters and spirituality develops, was what Irving and Cooper could lay no claim to. In Bryant something of this, in an early, primitive, and simple form of liberalism, came into the city, though it was not

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naturalized there. So lonely is it, indeed, that it is almost impossible for the mind to identify Bryant the poet with Bryant the editor. He himself kept the two lives distinct, and his distance and coldness was the aloofness of the poet in him from the world about him.

It is hard in any case to localize Bryant not merely in the city, but in America, because he is so elemental in his natural piety. That something Druidical which there is in his aspect sets him apart; he was in his verse a seer, or what we fancy a seer to be, a priest of the holy affections of the heart in communion with nature's God, one whose point of view and attitude suggest the early ministrations of adoring Magians, the intuitions of Indian sages, or the meditations of Greek philosophers. A sensitive mind can hardly rid itself of this old-world,

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or early-world, impression in respect to Bryant. The hills and skies of Berkshire had roofed a temple for him, and the forest aisled it, and wherever he moved he was within the divine precincts. Eternity was always in the same room with him. It was this sense of grandeur in nature and man, the perpetual presence of a cosmic relation, that dignified his verse and made its large impression; even his little blue gentian has the atmosphere of the whole sky. He was a master of true style, as refined in its plainness as was Irving's in its grace. If he was not national in a comprehensive sense, he was national in the sense that something that went to the making of the nation went to the making of him; the New England stock which had spread into the West and veined the continent with its spirit, as ore veins

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the rock, was of the same stuff as himself, and the race manifestation of its fundamental religious feeling in his pure and uncovenanted poetry was the same as in Channing's universality. Present taste may forget his work for a time, but its old American spirit has the lasting power of a horizon peak; from those uplands we came, and some of the songs heard there the nation will long carry in its heart. He was the last of the early triad of our greater writers, and his presence is still a memory in the city streets; but the city that was greater for his presence, as for Irving and Cooper, who had passed away before him, is also greater for their memory.

Between the major and the lesser gods of the city there is a great gulf fixed. Irving, Cooper, and Bryant were on the American scale—they were nation-

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al figures. There were almost none who could be described as second to them. Every metropolis, however, breeds its own race of local writers, like mites in a cheese, numerous and active, the literary coteries of their moment. To name one of them, there was Willis; he was gigantic in his contemporaneousness. He is shrunk now, as forgotten as a fashion-plate, though once the cynosure of the literary town. He was the man that Irving, by his richer nature, escaped being, the talented, clever, frivolous, sentimental, graceful artifice of a man, the town-gentleman of literature; he was the male counterpart of Fanny Fern and Grace Greenwood; he outlasted his vogue, like an old beau, and was the superannuated literary journalist. Yet in no other city was he so much at home as here, and in the memoirs of the town

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he would fill a picturesque and rightful place. A court would have embalmed him, but in a democracy his oblivion is sealed.

One or two other early names had a sad fortune in other ways. Drake and Halleck stand for our boyish precocity; death nipped the one, trade sterilized the other; there is a mortuary suggestion in the memory of both. Halleck long survived, a fine outside of a man, with the ghost of a dead poet stalking about in him, a curious experience to those who met him, with his old-fashioned courtesy and the wonder of his unliterary survival. Of the elder generation these are the names that bring back the old times, Willis, Drake, and Halleck; and they all suggest the community in a more neighborly way than the national writers.

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There was a culture in the old city which bred them, and a taste for letters such as grows up where there are educated men of the professions and a college to breed them. The slight influence of Columbia, however, and the main fact that it developed professional and technical schools instead of academic power, point to the controlling factor in the city's life, its preoccupation with practical and material interests. Literature was bound in such a modern community to be bottomed on commerce; whatever else it might be, it was first an article of trade to be used as news, circulated in magazines, sold in books. It has become, at present, largely an incident of advertising. New York was a great distributing centre, and editors, publishers, and writers multiplied exceedingly. The result was as

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inevitable here as in London or Paris, but the absence of a literary past and of a society of high-bred variety made a vast difference in the tone and in the product. Parnassus became a receding sentimental memory, fit for a child's wonder-book like Hawthorne's; but Bohemia was thronged, and its denizens grew like mushrooms in a cellar. There was, too, from the beginning, something bibulous and carnivorous in the current literary life; the salon did not flourish, but there was always a Bread-and-Cheese Club; and, indeed, from the days of Irving's youthful suppers, the literary legend of the city, not excluding its greater names, might be interestingly and continuously told by a series of memoirs of its convivial haunts. The men who frequented them and kept each other in countenance were as mortal,

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for the most part, as Pfaff's, once the Mermaid Tavern of the town-wits. Such resorts, too, are hot-houses for the development of clever lads; and literature suffered by the over-production of small minds. When in the history of letters gregariousness begins, one may look out for mediocrity. Great writers have found themselves in exile, in prison, in solitudes of all sorts; and great books are especially written in the country. Literature, too, is naturally exogamous; it marries with the remote, the foreign, the strange, and requires to be fertilized from without; but Bohemia, shut in its own petty frivolities, breeds the race of those manikins of Manhattan whose fame Holmes gibed at as having reached Harlem. Open Griswold and find their works; open Poe's *Literati* and find their epitaphs; of such is the kingdom of the

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Bohemians the world over. Such a race is incidental to a metropolitan literature; nor were they altogether inferior men; many of them led useful lives and won local eminence; some even achieved the honors of diplomacy. They contributed much to their own gayety and enlivened life with mutual admiration and contempt. Poe stirred up the swarm considerably. But no satire embalmed them in amber, and they are forgotten even by their own successors.

The city grew to be, through these middle years of the century, an ever-increasing mart of literary trade. The people, with their schools and Sunday-schools and habits of home-reading, were to be supplied with information and entertainment, and New York, like Philadelphia, became a great manufactory of books. The law of demand and sup-

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ply, however, has a limited scope in literature; it can develop quantity but not quality. Text-books, encyclopædias, popular knowledge, travel, and story all spawned in great numbers, but the literature of creation and culture continued to be sparse. It might have been thought that the literature of amusement, at least, would have flourished, and songs and plays have abounded; in fact, they did not exist except in the mediocre state. This infertility of the metropolis in the lasting forms of literature brings home to us the almost incredible famine of the time more sharply than even the tales that are told of the lack of expectation of any appreciation felt by the first great writers.

Irving's discovery that he could live by literature was a surprise to him; he had begun with an experiment rather than

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an ambition, and, having thus found his humor, he went on to make trial of sentiment, pathos, and romance. Cooper had no confidence—scarcely a hope—that an American novel would be accepted by his own countrymen. They had become so used to their lack of native productions as to mistake it for a permanent state. It was almost an accident that Cooper ever finished *The Spy*, and he did it much as the writer of a poem of classic rank to-day would complete it—in the scorn of circumstance and probably in ignorance of its reception.

The success of the greater writers was immediate and great; the city gave them dinners and has reared their statues, and was proud of them at the time in a truly civic way; but a cold obstruction of genius has set in ever since. The lesser writers approached them only on their

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feeblest side. Perhaps the bulk of emotional writing in every kind was of the sentimental sort. The men produced a good deal of it, but the women revelled and languished in it. Ben Bolt, the popular concert-hall tune of its day, was a fair example of its masculine form; and such writers as Mrs. Osgood and the Cary sisters illustrate its feminine modes. Sentimentality is apt to seem very foolish to the next generation in its words; but in character it survives with a more realistic impression; and in Poe, in his relations to these literary women, one sees the contemporary type. He was mated with Willis as the dark with the sunny, and as misery with mirth. He enchanted the poetesses and was enchanted, finding in each one a new lost Lenore. All his female figures, in their slightly varied monotone, Annabel and

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Annie, are in the realm of this sentimentality gone maudlin in him as it had gone silly in others. It was most wholesome when it stayed nearest to nature and domestic life; but there, too, it was feeble and lachrymose. The breath of the civil war put an end to it for the time; but even that great passion left few traces of itself in our letters. The writings of Dickens favored sentimentality, and much more the poems of Mrs. Browning and the early verse of Tennyson. We had our "little Dickenses," but it is significant of the temperament of our literature that we had not even a "little" Thackeray. Just above this level there was here and there a cultivated author, reminiscent of sentiment in its purer forms—of Lamb and Irving, for example—of whose small number Curtis stands eminent for cheerfulness, intrinsic

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winningness, and unfailing grace. He was the last of the line that began with Irving, through which the literary history of the city can be traced as if in lineal descent. In him sentiment was what it should always be—a touch, not the element itself.

It is quite in the order of things that in a literature so purely romantic as our own has been in the greater writers, sentimentality should characterize those of lesser rank, for it naturally attends romanticism as an inferior satellite. It has all vanished now, and left Lenore and Annie and Annabel its lone survivors. We are a romantic and sentimental nation, as is well known, and we are also a nation of efficiency. The literary energies of the nation, apart from its genius, have been immense in reality; they have gone almost wholly into popular

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education in its varied forms, and in no city upon such a scale as in New York. The magazines and the great dailies exhibit this activity in the most striking ways, both for variety and distinction; and on the side of literature, in the usual sense, from the days of the old *Mirror*, *Knickerbocker*, and *Democratic* the growth has been steady, and has carried periodical writing to its height of popular efficiency both for compass and power. The multitude of writers in the service have been substantially occupied with the production of news in the broadest sense. The poem and the essay have been rather things conceded than demanded, and make but a small part in the whole; but the news of the artistic, literary, and scientific worlds—fact, event, personality, theory, and performance—all this has been provided

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in great bulk. The writers strive to engage attention, to interest; and the matter of prime interest in such a city is the news of the various world. Even in the imaginative field something of the same sort is to be observed in the usual themes and motives. The detective story, for example, Japanese or other foreign backgrounds, the novel of adventure, and travel and animal sketches and the like, have an element of news; and the entire popularization of knowledge belongs in the same region of interest. Thought, reflection, meditation, except on political and social subjects, does not flourish; that brooding on life and experience, out of which the greatest literature emerges, has not been found, whatever the reason may be, and, in fact, it is rather a matter of original endowment than of the environment.

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The literary craft, however, if it lacked genius, has been characterized by facile and versatile talent, and its product has been very great in mass and of vast utility. In no other city is the power of the printed word more impressive. The true literature of the city is, in reality, and has long been, its great dailies; they are for the later time what the sermons of the old clergy were in New England—the mental sphere of the community—and in them are to be found all the elements of literature except the qualities that secure permanence.



THE LITERARY AGE OF BOSTON

HARVARD COLLEGE was the fountain-head of New England literature. Boston would have been an interesting place without its fructifying neighbor, such was its civic stock; with its double lobe of Puritan and Pilgrim, it would have been the brain of the State, a mart of trade, and a nest of rebels, but hardly, perhaps, one of the little, historic Meccas that perpetually challenge the real importance of metropolitan vastness; and in the hearts of its people, at least, with Florence and Edin-

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burgh, not to be profane with diviner names, Boston brings up the rear of small but famous towns. Whatever of truth there is in this well-known boast comes from the College. It happened in the old days, long before Harvard became the high altar of learning it now is, the feeding flame of manifold lofty causes, sacrosanct with honorable lives and the votive wealth of dying generations set apart for the disinterested uses of men; the present University, with its millions of money devoted to the unborn millions of our people, is a latter-day miracle with its own future all before it; but in the time that was, in the two centuries of humbleness, when the old College was still only the camp-fire kindled by the Muses in the wilderness, there lies an accomplished past, a work ended and done, whose memory

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most survives in the literary fame of Boston.

The collegiate spark, which is now parcelled out among museums and laboratories, and feeds an immense powerhouse of technical arts, applied sciences, and lucrative professions, was then rather a thing of men's bosoms, of the instincts of imagination, the guesses of philosophy, the intuitions of religion; if the University, through the inculcation of scientific knowledge and its varied training for useful pursuits, has now become more a great prop of the material state, the College discharged well its elder function as a restorer of the human spirit through the seeking of truth; and under its plain academic rule, before the old order changed, giving place to new, Harvard came into vital touch with the thoughts of men, and bore once that lit-

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tle, unnoticed flower of the soul whose seeds at last are blown throughout the world. It began, perhaps, in the time of Channing, and the first true contact may have been in that pure, mild spirit; then the young Emerson left the pulpit, the young Phillips mounted the platform; outside—for the academic race is never more than a small part of the various and abounding state—Garrison struck the hour. It was a crude, strange, composite time. The phalanx was converging on Brook Farm; dervishes of all kinds were camping round the Saadi tent at Concord; Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Lowell kept their lettered seclusion undisturbed; the Lyceum multiplied like a torch from village to village; and the new woman of the period had grown up in Margaret Fuller, and, in fact, in Sophia Peabody and Maria White she was

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already wedded to Hawthorne and Lowell. It was the literary age of Boston.

The traits of the period are still hard to grasp. The immense crudity of that age taxes our credulity, and at times perplexes us by arousing the sense of humor instead of exciting the organ of reverence. "Thou shalt read Hafiz," says Emerson, as he lays down the gospels; and the modern reader of Hafiz stands aghast! The amazing contradictions—young parsons leaders of the mob; the naïve surprises; Lowell as a temperance lecturer at the picnic where Maria White as queen was crowned with a coronal of pond-lilies; the suggestions, now of a deodorized Bohemia at Fresh Pond, or the Arcadia of married lovers and confirmed hermits at Walden, now of the *milieu* of the Vicar of Wakefield, and again of some *fête champêtre* in

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Sterne — all puzzle the ingenuous and unacclimated mind. The provinciality of the life is as fresh and startling, and as humanly interesting, as in the work of great novelists. The wonderful rurality of Lowell's youth, scarcely guessed even by his biographers, is one extreme; the other is, let us say, Allston, returned from abroad. He had known Coleridge. What a figure he wore in Cambridgeport! Had Jane Austen lived her girlhood at Salem, or Peacock passed a summer at Concord, what delightful mischief might have been ours! What an enrichment of our literature in eccentric and ever-laughable realism! But the society of which Allston was an ornament, the study of Ticknor, the dining-room of Judge Prescott, the counting-room of Francis and Thorndike, the court-room of Mason and Shaw, would have required

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a yet more masterly hand. We get glimpses of it in memoirs and anecdotes, but the scene yet waits its author, and is most like to pass away without a poet. Yet this conservative, commercial, respectable society of the travelled and home-keeping provincials is the background on which must be relieved the radicalism of Emerson and Phillips, the elegance of Longfellow, the self-sufficiency of Hawthorne, the manhood-worth of Whittier, the Brahmin pride of Holmes, the cleverness of Lowell. If the background be so impossible to sketch, still more is the sway and jostle of the contemporary crowd. Only a few impressions are firm enough to be put down.

Emerson stands the foremost figure. In him the spirituality of New England culminated and was so blended with

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practical character as to make him a very high type of his race. Spirituality was of the essence of New England from its birth, and underlies its historic democracy as the things of eternity underlie the things of time. In the earlier age, however, the soul-life was cramped in archaisms of thought and breeding and all expression was in stiffened forms. This Puritan past impresses our minds now very much as Byzantine art affects our eyes—as a thing in bonds. It is real, though remote; it shrouds mysteries of religious feeling dark to us; but, above all else, it seems a spirit imprisoned. Blake might so have pictured it more intelligibly with his rude strength; a thing gaunt, tragic, powerful, one of the Titan forms of human suffering. The enlargement, the enfranchisement, the new sphere of light, of labor and prayer

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had come before Emerson; he was born into a free world. The spread of Unitarianism in New England was a growth in the order of nature; it was not revolutionary; it was normal development; and in this mental expansion and moral softening, in the amelioration of the American spirit in all ways, which Unitarianism denoted in the community, Harvard College was the radiating influence. By his collegiate, clerical fathers, Emerson was in the first line of those who were to share the new thought and advance the new practice. The work of Channing and his friends is not to be forgotten, but in the lapse of time it has lost distinction, and blurs into half-remembered things like ancestral strains; the climax of the liberal movement was in Emerson's genius, and there shines, concentrated, a white light of the spirit

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for a long age. He was a pure radical; we are apt to forget how radical he was. Harvard recoiled, astounded and indignant at the son she had borne; yet it was from within her halls—and it is ever to be remembered for Harvard honor—that both the academic and the religious proclamation went forth from his lips, in the Phi Beta Kappa oration and the Divinity School Address; and, however the elders might disown and protest, the words fell on good ground in the hearts of youth and multiplied sixty and a hundred fold. It is not without reason that the Hall of Philosophy there should bear his name, now that all old controversies have fallen asleep, for both by his inheritance from the past and his influence upon the American world Harvard was the corner-stone of his pure and high fame.

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But, though Harvard and the things of Harvard were the essential environment of Emerson, and he was the child of the old College in a much larger sense than is usually meant by that phrase, there was something of much greater import in his genius, deeper, fast-rooted in what lies below education, intellect, and books, something communal that made him even more the son of the soil, one of the people. He had that quality of race which marks the aristocrat in the real sense of that word, whose abuse has almost exiled it from the speech of truth. What characterized the stock shone forth in him highly perfected and efficient, in the form of character, on both its heavenward and its earthward sides, and he possessed, besides, that accomplishment of language which allowed him to give the racial element in the

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form of literature. He would have been called, as the world goes, a poor man, but in his own village he was well-off; he lived, on his thousand or more dollars a year, the life of a refined gentleman, and reared his family, like others of his own station, on this sum in an atmosphere of true cultivation; he was economical, frugal even, and independent; but what distinguished him, and made him a true leader in that homogeneous community, was that he kept the old perspective of the relative worth of spiritual and temporal things, inherited from Puritan days in the habits of the mind, and held to the lasting transcendence of the one and the evanescence of the other, without any sense of effort or consciousness of peculiarity, just as his neighbors also did, but he did it in a singularly high and exemplary way.

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In a world so conceived his freedom was remarkable, his disengagement, his independence of thought and action both, his responsibility only to himself, his indifference to others' views. Scarce any man was so free as he. His self-possession in this attitude was almost spectacular to others. It struck them as "sublime insolence," and any number of such phrases of amazement at a man who was simply true to himself, and took no more thought of the crowd or of the individual than he did of the morrow. Truth had never a better seeker, he took only what was necessary for the journey, and what he found with his eyes he declared with his lips. Things that were not in the line of his search did not interest him; they might be matters as grave and sacred, as endeared and intimate, as the Holy Communion, but

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he passed on; of course he shocked many a tender conscience and many a hardy dogmatist, but he was ignorant of it essentially, being clad in a panoply of innocence that was almost simplicity of mind. The same spirit that he showed in religious thought he exhibited also in politics, and not temporary politics only, but that lasting Americanism which he moulded into so many memorable phrases of freedom, equality, and fraternity.

His time of illumination was in early manhood, and the little work called *Nature* was its gospel; later, as he travelled farther from the light, he declined on more mundane matters of morals and manners, on conduct, on the question of human behavior in one or another way, and left the old, speculative table-lands of his youth, and with him life after

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thirty-five was a declining day. Yet always his method was by intuition; his courage responded to the challenge of the unknown, to the tangle-growth of poetry and philosophy, to the dragon-jaws of paradox; and if at times, in our more sophisticated sight, Emerson in his mental adventures seems to suffer from the irrepressible joke that lurks in life, almost like some Parson Adams of the mind, he is only thereby brought the nearer to our home-breed, and graced the more with that nameless quality which, in other ways, also shines from his figure, and endears the Don Quixote of every idealistic race. Such he was—the idealism of New England in its human saintship; or, if not quite that, as near it as Heaven ever makes the living Don Quixotes of real life.

These analogies may seem derogatory,

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but they are not really so; they are, in their sphere, patents of true nobility, another sort of crowning phrase to tell how that in his mortal life he was not untouched by the pathetic grotesqueness which clings to the idealist everywhere in this tough world, while in his soul he was also the white flower of Puritanism—*flos regum*, the last of his race. Puritanism, the old search for God in New England, ended in him; and he became its medium at its culminating moment of vision and freedom, because he was a racial man, and held, condensed, purified, and heightened in his own heart, the developed genius of the small, free, resolute, righteous, God-fearing people, the child of whose brief centuries he was; they found no other world-voice. Emerson was their gift at the great altar of man.

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If Emerson was the concentration and embodiment of the inward Puritan life, the strength and beauty of the naked soul that had cast the garment of the past and emerged at last in lucid regions, Longfellow—who, perhaps from some prepossession in favor of poets, I cannot but regard as second in the New England group—was representative of the outward charm of intellectual culture as it came to fulness in the community; and, though it may seem a mere subtlety to say so, intellectual culture is, in truth, an outward thing. So, too, as Harvard, by virtue of being the fount of the old ministry, the place of the enlightenment and enlargement when the kinder hour came, and the nursery of the youth who heard and followed the new voice, had bred, nourished, and supported Emerson, the old College also performed a

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similar service for Longfellow, opening the way for him, yielding him a place in the midst of her power, and surrounding him from youth to age with such a happy environment of friends and things that he might well think of his lot as the special favor of Heaven.

He was Maine-born, and reared at the neighboring college of Bowdoin, to whose academic influences he was greatly indebted; but Harvard, in adopting him, made him her own, and gave him a career among her own, and he and the humane studies he stood for became an integral and lasting part of the ideal of Harvard culture, which has suffered no essential change even now, though its relative sphere at Harvard is much narrowed, partaking the spiritual retrogression, the decline in refinement, of the nation at large. It is true that this ideal

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of Harvard culture had already begun to form before Longfellow's time. Just as Channing had prepared the way for Emerson in the things of the pure spirit, George Ticknor was the precursor of Longfellow, not only as a scholar in whom the refining power of scholarship was eminent, but as a scholar in the same fields of literature. Yet the crest of the wave, which was the first movement of Old-World culture across the Atlantic, was certainly Longfellow's Dante, of which his earlier collections and translations were forerunners, and to which Lowell's work, when he came to succeed him, was hardly more than an appendix. That first appropriation of foreign thought in New England took place so obscurely, and had so few distinctive results in our own literature, that its history and import are much forgotten. It

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deserves a little chapter to itself when our literature comes to be written in any other than a biographical form.

The impact of Carlyle and a few other single figures, such as Goethe, Lessing, Fourier, is sometimes noted, and to such writers as Ripley and Margaret Fuller, Hedge and Hilliard, much is due. What Longfellow accomplished did not lie so much in this field of individual authors and specific thought on particular matters then of current interest; he brought over, as it were, whole literatures, putting us in touch as a nation with the tongues of the north and south of Europe alike, with all the shores of old romance, with the spirit that abides beautiful in the chronicles of wasted time; he annexed by a stroke of the pen this literary past of Europe to our New World; at least to him, as unquestionably the first mod-

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ern scholar of his time, a scholar of the spirit as well as of the text, go the praise and the grateful remembrance of all who have since followed, though far off, in his footsteps. So Emerson, too, first felt the fructifying power of Oriental thought in his own sphere of philosophy and the poetry of general causes, and interpreted it somewhat, however defective the interpretation; and through these two men largely such expansion as contrasts with fresh and novel literatures can give came to our education. It is in this part of his work that Harvard, holding up Longfellow's hands, most helped the cause of civilization so far as that is involved in the permanence of literature, and received for her reward that ideal of Harvard culture, already referred to, which is embedded in her traditions.

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As a scholar Longfellow was cosmopolitan, but in that portion of his life which was the fruit of his poetic gift he was distinctively American. If the mildness of his nature be considered, the fervor of Longfellow's patriotism was a very marked quality; his habitual artistic control conceals its real force, but does not hide its clear depth; from the early days, when he was all for Americanism in literature, through his manhood friendship with Sumner, and his anti-slavery poems, to the darker days of the sinking of the Cumberland and the prayer for the ship of state, he was one with his country's aspiration, struggle, and trial, one in heart with her life; but he showed this patriotic prepossession of his whole nature, if less touchingly, still more significantly, by his choice of American themes for what were in no

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sense occasional poems, but the greater works in which he built most consciously and patiently for her fame in poetry—in *Hiawatha*, *Evangeline*, *Miles Standish*, and the like. It is the fashion to decry these poems now, yet the fact cannot be gainsaid that each of these remains the only successful poem of its kind—one of Indian life, one of the colonial pastoral, one of the Puritan idyl—while the trials made by others have been numerous; and in each of these, but especially in the first two, there is in quality a marvellous purity of tone which, for those who are sensitive to it, is one of the rarest of poetic pleasures. It is also the fashion to decry the shorter poems by which Longfellow entered into the homes of the people, but if Heaven ever grants the prayer that a poet may write the songs of a

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people, it is surely in such poems as these that the divine gift reveals its presence. They are in the mouths of children and on the lips of boys, and that is well; but they are also strength and consolation to older hearts; they are read in quiet hours, they are murmured in darkened rooms, they blend with the sacred experiences of many lives. Say what one will, the Psalm of Life is a trumpet-call, and a music breathes from Resignation, in which the clod on the coffin ceases to be heard, and dies out of the ear at last with peace. In the grosser spirit of life that now everywhere prevails, even among the best, and is not confined to any one sphere of politics, art, or letters, nor to any one country or capital, it is not surprising that the fame of Longfellow should be obscured; but his silent presence must still be deep-

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ly and widely felt in those simpler and million homes that make up the popular life which, as the whole history of poetry shows, can never be corrupted. Longfellow had this remarkable and double blessing: he was the product of the old Puritan stock at its culminating moment of refinement, its most cultivated gentleman, and he also enters most easily at lowly doors.

Hawthorne is the third great New England name, and many would place him higher than either Emerson or Longfellow, in valuing his pure genius; but from the point of view here taken, which is mainly one of historical significance and the communal life, he falls necessarily into an inferior position. He, too, was the child of the old Puritanism, and, like the others, was emancipated from its bonds from boyhood; but something

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stayed in his blood which in the others had suffered a happy change. The genius of Emerson and Longfellow worked in the line of growth, so that they mark in their different spheres the attainment of a new goal; the genius of Hawthorne involved rather a reversion to the Puritan past, and, not only that, but to what was grim, harsh, and terrible in its spirit; his genius worked in a reactionary way upon the theme of his brooding, and he threw open the doors of the past rather than the gates of the future. He found what people find in tombs—dead sins and mouldered garments of the soul. Puritanism was to him a dreadful memory, which so fastened on his mind as to obtain new life, like an evil obsession there, as if, in truth, it were still contemporary in men's bosoms too, and he could read them by its dark light.

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This recrudescence of Puritanism, in an imaginative form, in Hawthorne, was the cardinal thing about him in relation to the community; by virtue of it he made Tuscany another Salem, and gave the treasures of Catholic art to feed the fires of the Puritan Moloch. His village world of observation was his own, as he saw it in daily life and faithfully recorded it; but his world of imagination was the old Puritan country-side, seen in spectral, uncanny, Dantesque ways, a hateful past full of pictures turning to life under his hand, to your life and my life, to the life of man as it is in the eternal present. He could not shake it off; his genius cast shadow; he was a profound pessimist—sin to him was life. Out of all this came a single new creation, which with Knickerbocker and Leatherstocking makes the

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third original American type, Donatello; like them, he has no basis in vital life; he is a blend of elemental things, a dream of the mind, an emanation half of the artistic senses of a poetic temperament in love with life, half of the remorseful thought of a heart that had "kept watch o'er man's mortality"; but, visionary as he is, Donatello is a true imaginative type, no more to be forgotten than the other purely artistic figures of literature, like Sir Galahad, like the Red Cross Knight, of whose race he is. It seems a miracle of time that drew out of the dark bosom of Puritanism this figure of the early world, fair with Greek beauty, and made its plastic loveliness the flower in art of the Puritan conscience.

It is art that finally sets Hawthorne aloof from the others in a place of his

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own. It might almost be said that for him heredity had become environment, so much did the past overshadow the present in his moral temperament, his outlook on life, and his probings of its mysteries; his genius, in its most concentrated and intense work, was deeply engaged in this inherited subject-matter, this reluctant, repellent, stubborn Puritan stuff, the dark, hard ore; but the object of his attention being thus given, and the manner of its interpretation being born in him, also, he remained for the rest more the pure literary artist than his contemporaries in New England; the instinct of romantic art for its own mere sake was in him. In the expanding life of New England this thing, too, had happened with other things: an artist had been born there. He was strangely indifferent to everything in

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the community, he was solitary and a man apart; but he was faithful to his own one talent, the power to take an original view of the world, a romantic view, and turn it to pictures in the loom of literature. The world remained the old Puritan world, all the world he knew; but in his eyes it became a pictorial thing, while retaining, necessarily, its moral substance and tragic suggestiveness, and it took on artistic form under his hand. His love for his art and the things in life that would feed it was absorbing; he idled at all times when not employed with it; he found his happiness in exercising it; it was his art that was necessary to him, not its message; he lived by imagination. In him, consequently, the communal life is seen in the last of its threefold manifestations in the literature of the old Puritan race; in Emerson

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it shows forth in the pure soul, in Longfellow it blossomed in the heart, and in Hawthorne it left, as on darkness, its imaginative dream.

In these three men the genius of the people, working out in the place and among the things of its New England nativity, reached its height, so far as concerns that partial expression which literature can give to a people's life. They were surrounded by manifold other activities of the communal spirit, in politics, trade, philanthropy, taking place in a busy state; they were supported, however, by an educated class in large numbers of similar breeding, sympathetic in taste and interest, and openly appreciative of their labors; and there were, also, perhaps a score of other writers about them among whom three still stand out with great prominence—

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Holmes, Whittier, and Lowell—of whom two, as in the other group, were closely bound to Harvard College.

Holmes was, in fact, what he liked to be thought—a town wit. His attachment to the English of the eighteenth century was the result of a native sympathy. He was a citified man, such as the old Londoners were. He was not so much a New-Englander as he was a Bostonian, and not so much a Bostonian as he was a "Brahmin," to use his own name for the thing, with just that diminishing inclusiveness that Henry James expressed in saying of Thoreau that he was "more than provincial; he was parochial." Holmes was, in certain ways, the city parallel to that. It is seen in his consciousness of his audience, which is ever present, in the dinner-talk flavor of his prose, in the local "asides" of his

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many occasional poems; he has not the art to forget himself. Such a writer is seldom understood except by the generation with which he is in social touch; magnetism leaves him; he amuses his own time with a brilliant mental vivacity, but there it ends.

Whittier was the opposite of Holmes; he was the poet of the plain people, born among them and never parting company by virtue of education or that sort of growth which involves a change in social surroundings. His Quaker blood distinguished him from the others, who were all Unitarians; but the distinction is illusory, for his Quakerism did for him precisely what Unitarianism did for them in giving mildness and breadth to his religious spirit. It is by his piety that he most appeals now to the general heart; by his reminiscences of the out-

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ward form of New England country-life and its domestic types, as in Snow-bound, he came near to the homes of the community as a whole, while as the antislavery poet he held a specific and historic place in the life of the times; the three strains of interest, especially when felt through the medium of his simple goodness, preserve his fame; moreover, as a people's poet, whose humble manhood remained unspoiled, he is assured of long memory. As a type of character he was as appropriate for the country as Holmes was for the city; though both are high types, and though it seems paradoxical, Whittier had vastly the greater range. Both were deeply rooted in the soil, and had native history in their blood; both, too, were provincial in a way that their three great contemporaries were not.

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In the case of Lowell there is still something enigmatic. He was younger than the others; he was more complex in nature, and changed more from youth to age and even late in life. He alone owed much of his public recognition to the accident of office. He cannot take his own place in literature until, like Irving, he is forgotten as an ambassador. He came of Unitarian ancestry, like Emerson; he was bred on the same studies as Longfellow, whom he succeeded as a scholar; he developed criticism, but did not relinquish poetry; he did not work hard at either prose or verse. *The Biglow Papers* is his most original work, racy of the soil and the times, in its homelier sphere as native a product of the practical as Donatello is of the spiritual temper of that breed of men. *The Commemoration Ode* is his loftiest

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achievement. He was the poet of the civil war in a sense not so true of any of the four older poets. He lived in a Harvard atmosphere all his life, but no man was less academic. His prose came mainly from his brain, and is of a transitory nature, and steadily grows less interesting. These seem the main facts about him. He now seems essentially a man of letters, of high endowments, having the accomplishment of verse with his many other rich and varied gifts, and no more than that. It would appear that the inspiration that gave us Emerson, Longfellow, and Hawthorne had already begun to fail, and beat with a lowered pulse in the youngest and last of the group.

It becomes plain on looking back that the literary age of Boston was before the civil war. With the exception of Low-

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ell—and this helps to explain his position—the character of these men was formed and their work completely determined before 1860, and most of it was done. It was all the aftermath of Puritanism in literature. The debt it owed to Unitarianism is clear; its direct and indirect obligation to Harvard College, though but partially set forth, is obviously great, and just as clearly was due to the old humanities as there taught. In forty years we have drifted further perhaps than any of us have thought from the conditions and influences that gave our country so large a part of its literary distinction.

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THE South has from the beginning contained, in the mass, a peculiar people. The special traits of its literary history are not wholly explained by the statement, so often made, that there colonial conditions of life continued until the social dissolution brought about by the civil war, and that colonial conditions, as has been seen, did not in the North result in original literature. Much that was favorable to literary development existed in the South from the formation of the Union onward. The aspects of natural scenery there, pict-

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uresque, luxuriant, novel, with features of moorland and mountain, of lowland and upland, of river and coast, of rice and cotton culture, of swamp, bayou, and sand, of a bird and flower world of marvellous brilliancy and music, of an atmosphere and climate clothing the night and day and the seasons of the stars in new garments of sensibility and suggestion—all this was like a new theme and school to the poet who should chance to be born there. The human history of the States, too, with its racial features of mingled Gallic and Scotch strains in the blood of the country, with its adventurous conquest of the land beyond the mountains and about the mouths of the Mississippi, with its border traditions, was both various and exciting to the imagination, hardly less than was the open air

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of the plains or the fascination of the Golden Gate in the West. The historical culture of the past gave a starting-point; education, books, travel were to be found in a leisure class, who were the masters of the land. The power of nature, the power of race, and the power of the transmitted civilization of older times were not lacking; there was even a radiating centre. Virginia, in what was its great age, offered fair hope of true leadership in the supreme functions of national life. The group of the Revolution, which has made the State illustrious in history, lasted far on into the next age, and was distinguished not only by individual force, but by an enlightenment and generosity of mind of the happiest promise. Jefferson, in particular, who was the one great dreamer ever born in this land, was well fitted

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to be not only the fountain-head of a Declaration and of a University, but of a literature; or, if not the fountain-head, he, at least, held the rod to smite the rock. It is, perhaps, forgotten that in the fall of 1776 Jefferson, in association with four other Virginian gentlemen, proposed a general system of law in which one measure was for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. It is thus described:

“After a preamble, in which the importance of the subject to the Republic is most ably and eloquently announced, the bill proposes a simple and beautiful scheme whereby science (like justice under the institutions of our Alfred) would have been carried to every man's door. Genius, instead of having to break its way through the thick, opposing clouds of native obscurity, indigence,

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and ignorance, was to be sought for through every family in the commonwealth; the sacred spark, wherever it was detected, was to be tenderly cherished, fed, and fanned into a flame; its innate properties and tendencies were to be developed and examined, and then cautiously and judiciously invested with all the auxiliary energy and radiance of which its character was susceptible. What a plan was here to give stability and solid glory to the Republic!"

It was surely a generous dream of these five Virginian gentlemen, and shows the spirit and outlook of that enthusiastic and public-spirited age in the Old Dominion. But, none the less, it was the light of a false dawn. Public spirit died out in Virginia before these men were dead.

What was it that sterilized the fresh

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strength of the young nation in its fairest poetic region? The commonplace is to say that it was the institution of slavery; and, however far the analysis be pressed, it does not really escape from this answer, from the repeated burden of all lands and climates that genius, the higher life of man, withers in the air of social tyranny. Slavery is a mutual bond; to a true and impartial eye the masters are also caught and bound in the same chains with the slaves. Certain it is that literature in any proper sense ceased even to be hoped for, and ceased also to be respected as one of the vital elements of national life.

It is curious to observe that what the South afforded to general literature, in the main, was given into the hands of strangers. There was an interesting plantation life in Virginia on great es-

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tates, pre-Revolutionary, and not dissimilar in certain aspects to the life of the great Tory houses of the North, and of these latter no trace in literature survives; but the Virginian record was written by Thackeray's imagination. There was in the South of later days the great theme of slavery itself, a varied and mighty theme even before the civil war gave it epical range; in those days it was still only a story of individual human lives, but it was written in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the one book by which the old South survives in literature, for better or worse. Characteristic Southern scenery added more to Whittier's verse than to that of any poet of its own soil. It will also, perhaps, be regarded as curious, though not the less true, to observe that such literature as the South produced by native writers is

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so intimately connected with the national life that the closeness of its relation thereto is, broadly speaking, the measure of its vitality. This is plainly the case in so far as the intellectual vigor of the South was confined to legal and political channels, and found its chief outlet in the national councils through argument and oratory; and this is the chief part of the matter. But it is also true of such a writer of the imagination as Simms, the most distinguished prose author of the South and typical of its middle period, who found his best themes in national episodes; and it is true of Poe, the sole writer of the first rank, whose popularity and appeal were always in the mid-stream of contemporary national production, who lived in the national literary market-places, and entered into his fame by prevailing

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with the readers of the magazines and books of the national public. The colonial dependence of the South in literary matters was not on Europe, but on the North; its literature took up a provincial relation thereto; its authors emigrated, mentally and often bodily, thither; in other words, Southern literature does not exist, in any of its forms, political, fictional, or poetic, except in relation to the national idea, either as its product or as the result of reaction from it. The nation was the parent of all the higher activity of the mind of the South, fostered, sustained, and prospered it, even when that activity was directed against itself. There is nothing exceptional in this, for it belongs to the nature of literature to flourish where the social life of the community is largest, most vital, and culminative.

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The decadence of the cultivated intellectual life of Virginia—and in that State alone did it exist in a virile condition—was coincident with the declining years of Jefferson and his great associates; but it did not take place without the continuing presence of the older and nobler ideals. The man in whom these were conspicuous, and who best represents what was most humane, enlightened, and fairest in the community, was William Wirt, now almost a forgotten name. He was primarily a man of the law, though distinguished as much for eloquence as for argument and reasoning; he had, besides, a certain dignity of mind. He was of the next generation after the Revolutionary fathers, and in him one feels the after-glow of a great time. He was still in touch with English literary tradition, and occasionally

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ventured on works beyond the view and interests of the law, the fruits of that true liberal education which he possessed. The Letters of the British Spy was his most significant book, a little work, and in itself of very trifling importance, but sufficient in its own day to win reputation akin to literary fame. What it discloses now to the rare reader of its pages is the mind of a Virginian of that generation, perhaps the best mind. The eighteenth century still rules in it, not merely in the form and method, but in the weight of the thought, the close, compact, accurate expression of the sense, the worth of the reflections; it is, in other words, intellectual in precisely the same way that Burke is intellectual. Still more striking, to one who attempts to place the book, the type of mind, the culture of the understanding, in time, is

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the old-fashioned classicism of the writer. This classicism was distinctly a Southern trait; not that it was not found elsewhere, but that in the South it was prized more dearly and lasted longer than elsewhere. The place where the eighteenth century finally died was the South; and this mind of William Wirt was, perhaps, the last recognizable English mind where it burned or flickered. The advice that he gives to some young aspirant to cultivate facility in quoting from Latin authors, because it is agreeable to the Supreme Court, has a pleasant flavor of age. He was himself familiar with such classics, and with English writers like Boyle. These books of a large masculine stamp had formed his mind, and they live in his respect and affection. A predominant interest in oratory is noticeable, not as it is to-day,

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but the Ciceronian, Demosthenic stripe, the oratory of the British Parliament, by which one comes vividly near to Patrick Henry in the past, and understands better Calhoun and Webster in their turn. It is all gone now—the eighteenth century, the classicism, oratory, and all; and the shadow of it no longer remains at Washington. But it is clear that, save that there is here a legal mind interested in the solid thinking of Burke, Boyle, and Franklin, this is the parallel in Virginia to what Irving was in New York, himself by literary affiliation nearer to Addison and Goldsmith. Wirt was the companion figure to Irving, and marks the contemporaneousness of the eighteenth century growing moribund in both of these colonies; yet both, too, are sharers in the new life of the new land. Irving passed

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through the purgation and enlargement of long foreign residence, and his genius developed by virtue of a pure original literary gift, and he was continually a more accomplished writer, and finally made a great American name; Wirt, the national lawyer, remained in the surroundings amid which he was reared, and added nothing to what he had inherited from the literary past.

The society of Virginia in that generation is very clearly seen in Wirt's lively sketches of figures of the bar, and in the tone and substance of his correspondence. The mental strength of the men, and the original peculiarities of their character, are such as belong to annals of the bar everywhere; the circuit acquaintance of Lincoln, or of Choate, bears the same general stamp; but one is made aware of a classic tradition of

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composition and delivery, and also of a mode of life, in Wirt's sphere which are distinctive, and which are recognized as Virginia traits. Any discussion of Virginia matters finally turns to a description of the social life, which was the pride of the State and its chief pleasure. If books were to be written there, this would naturally be the subject. It was Kennedy, of Maryland, the friend and biographer of Wirt, who utilized this material, and thereby became the representative of intellectual taste, culture, and achievement, for his generation, in much the same way as Wirt had been in the former time, so far as literary remembrance is concerned. He was a gentleman of the same classical breeding, and of similar affiliations with the eighteenth century; but he was also more powerfully and directly affected by

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Irving's example and success. He undertook, in the leisure of a legal and political life, to portray the scenes, incidents, and characters of a Virginia plantation in *Swallow Barn*, with a sketchy and rambling pen; and he succeeded in producing a little Virginia classic. The book is essentially on the level of Mrs. Stowe's *Old Town Folks*, and similar provincial pictures of old country people, except that the touch is finer, and especially there is the pervading sense of literary reminiscence in the narrative declaring its kinship with masterly literature of the past. *Swallow Barn* is, in effect, something between the *Roger de Coverley Papers* and *Waverley*, with Irving as the interpreter, the author's guide and friend. It is a non-descript tale, made up of plantation scenes, genteel comedy, rural realism, figures

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from all conditions of life, crude superstitious tales, humors of the law, and one thing and another that a visitor might observe and set down as notes of a residence in the district. Typical Southern character of several varieties abounds in its pages. Yet as a literary description of the society it attempts to depict, it falls far short of any excellence which would allow it to be placed in the class to which it aspires.

Nor in his other writings does Kennedy succeed in making himself a man of letters. His books are entertaining, as diaries and travellers' tales please the reader, but not after the style and fashion of imaginative writers. It is rather the author himself who is significant, the refined and amiable gentleman whose taste is for literary elegance, and whose capacity to write is rather one of

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his mild accomplishments than an original gift, but whose title to rank as the representative of his community in letters is indisputable. A fine representative he is, too; one who would have graced any literary coterie of the English world; but a man of instincts and tastes, of sympathetic warmth and kindly humorousness, of sweet behavior, rather than a man of powers. He stands practically alone, too; for Beverly Tucker, though of a similar sphere, and following Cooper instead of Irving, has a much laxer hold on remembrance. In these men the emasculated tradition of the eighteenth century, though reinforced by the fresh vigor of Irving's and Cooper's success with American subjects, died out; and Virginia life, never virile in imaginative creation, became very slightly receptive even of the mod-

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ern writers, though the Georgian poets, and especially Byron and Moore, were somewhat known.

The best gauge of the literary vitality of the South towards the middle of the century is the magazine which White founded at Richmond, *The Southern Literary Messenger*. The mere fact that this periodical was started testifies to the presence of intellectual interests in the community. Education of the sort befitting a young gentleman of the day was provided for the youth of the ruling class by private tutors, by travel, by residence at Yale or Harvard, or elsewhere in the North, and by the home University of Virginia. This last institution, the work of Jefferson's foreseeing mind, never ceased to be one of the great schools of the nation. If its power and rank were to be measured by equip-

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ment after our present materialistic fashion, they might seem little enough; but if they are judged rather by the number and quality of the minds there educated, by the leadership of such minds in the State and nation, by the spread of their influence through the farther South and Southwest, the efficient force of the University must be highly rated as a factor in society. None of its students ever lost the impress of its classical studies and its standards of behavior. Poe, for example, shows in his writings more traces of his schooling than any other American author. Undoubtedly, the University is to be credited with the formation of the intellectual habit of the South, and its work was rather supplemented than displaced by foreign residence.

The Richmond magazine was essen-

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tially dependent on this body of University men and their friends throughout the South. It would be, nevertheless, a wild hyberbole to describe these men and their families as a reading class; there was, properly speaking, no public at the South. The contents of the magazine, if Poe's exceptional work in its first two years be excluded, though not comparing unfavorably with its rivals elsewhere, are exceedingly tame and dreary. Local pride is much in evidence, and the presence of provincial reputations is acutely felt; but of literature there is truly not a trace. No democracy ever bred such a mediocrity of talent as this aristocratically constructed society. For one thing—and it is true of the whole literary past of the South—there is no interest in ideas; there are no ideas. There had been a time when Voltaire was much

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read in Virginia, though the traces of it are now wellnigh lost in the dust-heap, and there had been radical thinking by young men; but no one came after Voltaire. Perhaps this is the fundamental trouble, after all; for how can literature flourish in the absence of ideas? The banality of the question indicates the poverty of the situation. A classical upbringing on Horace, a library of *The Spectator*, *Waverley*, and *Moore's Poems*, taken in connection with even the best endeavor to achieve Ciceronianism or Addisonianism or any other imitatively perfect style, could not accomplish much by themselves. An air without ideas is the deadliest of literary atmospheres. This was perhaps less thoroughly true of Virginia than of the farther South, where political passion was more absorbing as time swung

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grimly on. The great age of Virginia culminating in the glory of her Presidents had gone by, and a less strenuous race had succeeded; but the men of South Carolina were stronger than their fathers had been, and the climax of her great age was to be in the civil war, towards which her social force moved for a generation with towering pride and fatal certainty. Yet one does not find about Calhoun an intellectual group, nor is there anywhere about the statesmen of the Secession that air of letters and philosophy and the higher interests of man which was so marked a feature of the Revolutionary time. The literary state of this later period is most fully and characteristically shown, as is natural, in South Carolina itself, the true seat of Southern power then; but the lowness of the ebb is keenly apparent

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in the fact that the illustrative author is so inferior a man as Simms.

Simms was of Irish extraction, to which was due his literary gift, and the strain in him was one of recent immigration. The South had little part in his making, and gave him in the main no more than an environment and the nucleus of a fierce local patriotism. He was not one of the ruling class, but the child of an adventurer who himself found Charleston unendurable, and went farther into the Southwest to find a home and a living. Simms remained behind and grew up in the neighborhood of the traditions of the Revolution and the backwoodsmen. He was a man of overflowing animal force, self-assertive, ambitious, destined to be self-made. He had poetical susceptibility and dreaming faculty, a Celtic base in

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him, which led him to the composition of facile and feeble poems; but drifting off into fiction, as he tried his hand at all kinds of writing, he finally produced, amid the voluminous output, a few colonial romances by which he made a more lasting impression. They lack those qualities which make literature of a book, but they survive by virtue of their raw material, which has both historical and human truth; and in certain episodes and scenes he shows narrative and even dramatic power. He followed in Cooper's track in these tales, and chose the American subject near to him in the life of his part of the country in the preceding generations of its conquest from the Indian and the Briton. The tales will, therefore, always retain a certain importance as a picture of social conditions and warfare. He, nevertheless, did not

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find himself accepted and honored in his own community. He made several journeys to the North, and had many friends among the literary men there, and published his books there. The North was his outlet into the world of letters.

In South Carolina it was felt that such a man as Legaré was the proper representative of Southern culture. Literary taste still clung to the library; it has the conservatism of the school-reader, and never passed the nonage of a good classical pupil. Contemporary literature, with romantic and realistic vigor, however closely allied to the masters of the North, had no vogue. It was considered that a Southern literature was impossible. The foolishness of Chivers testifies to that in Georgia no less than the powerful irascibility of

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Simms in South Carolina. Yet, with wonderful persistency, magazine after magazine was launched at Charleston, had its callow years of feebleness, and died. It seemed not only that the South could produce nothing of itself; what came to it from contact with the larger world of English speech could not take root in that soil. A few books of humor, long ago extinct, may be excepted; but, save for these, the condition of the country beyond Charleston was like that of the Ohio valley and the Iowa prairie in literary destitution. Even in New Orleans, now an old city, there was less of literature than in Charleston itself.

It is sometimes suggested that this blight which fell on the literary spirit everywhere in the South affected not only the reception of books actually written, but also the development of such minds

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of literary capacity as were born in the community; that there was a discouragement of genius itself in the fact that while literature in common with all the fine arts requires an open career and honor for the poorest in social position and opportunity, here fixed aristocratic prejudice and materialistic self-satisfaction and the vanity and indifference that belong everywhere to irresponsible wealth, made success impossible. However that may be, it is clear that literature in the South had by the time of the civil war become dead. The position of Simms as the representative and central figure of the literary life there is made the more prominent by the companionship of younger men in his latter days; of Timrod, like the whippoorwill, a thin, pathetic, twilight note, and of Hayne, whom one would rather liken to

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the mocking-bird, except that it does no kind of justice to the bird. With them the literature of the old South ceased.

There remains the solitary figure of Poe, the one genius of the highest American rank, who belongs to the South. It is common to deny that he was distinctively a Southern writer, not so much on the score of his birth at Boston as because he is described as a world-artist, unrelated to his local origin, unindebted to it, and existing in a cosmopolitan limbo, denationalized, almost dehumanized. But mortal genius always roots in the soil, and is influenced and usually shaped by its environment of birth, education, and opportunity. It appears to me that Poe is as much a product of the South as Whittier is of New England. His breeding and education were Southern; his manners, habits of thought, and

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moods of feeling were Southern; his sentimentalism, his conception of womanhood and its qualities, of manhood and its behavior, his weaknesses of character, bore the stamp of his origin; his temperament even, his sensibility, his gloom and dream, his response to color and music, were of his race and place. It is true that he was not accepted during his life by the society of Richmond any more than was Simms by the aristocracy of Charleston. But the indifference of an aristocratic society to men of letters not in its own set is no new thing; it belongs to the nature of such society the world over. It is more germane to observe that Poe's education, the books on which he fed, gives us the best and fullest evidence available as to the kind and degree of literary culture possible to any Virginia youth of talent, and its range

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and quality serve to modify our idea as to the nature of that culture in the South, and lead us to a broader and truer conception of intellectual conditions there.

It does not appear that Poe in his early education or in the accessibility of books during his first manhood was at any disadvantage with his contemporaries in the North; the difference between him and his Southern compatriots was that he made the fullest use of his opportunities. He fed on Byron, Moore, and Coleridge, and as he went on in years he was among the first to hail Tennyson and the later writers, in prose as well as verse, and he always kept pace with contemporaneous productions. He did this before he left the South, as well as afterwards. He stands out from the rest because he had the power of genius,

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and was not, like Simms, a man of talent merely. When he came to the North, where he spent his mature life, he brought his Southern endowment with him. His relations with women were still sentimental; his attitude to men, his warm and frank courtesies to friends, his bitter angers towards others, his speech, garb, and demeanor denoted his extraction. No stranger meeting him could have failed to recognize him as a Southerner. He always lived in the North as an alien, somewhat on his guard, somewhat contemptuous of his surroundings, always homesick for the place that he well knew would know him no more though he were to return to it. In his letters, in his conversations, in all reminiscences of him, this mark of the South on him is as plain as in his color, features, and personal bearing.

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But, though this be granted, and there is no gainsaying it, it is universally maintained that his genius was destitute of any local attachment. I shall hardly do more than suggest a contrary view. In one respect, indeed, he seems wholly apart from the South. He was a critic, with well-reasoned standards of taste and art. The South is uncritical. The power of criticism, which was one of the prime forces of modern thought in the last century, never penetrated the South. There was never any place there, nor is there now, for minorities of opinion, and still less for individual protest, for germinating reform, for frank expression of a view differing from that of the community. In this respect the South was as much cut off from the modern world, and still is, as Ireland is from England in other ways. It lies outside the

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current of the age, and this is one reason why there was such an absence of ideas in its life. Poe, on the other hand, was a critic of independent mind and unsparing expression. Yet it is noticeable that he never criticised a Southern writer adversely, except when he had some personal animosity. It is only to be added that Poe was a critic who escaped from the environment within whose limits his critical power would have been crushed. But in his imaginative work, is it not true that the conception of character and incident in such tales as William Wilson, The Assignment, The Cask of Amontillado are distinctly Southern? Are not all his women in the romantic tales elaborations of suggestions from Southern types? Is not *The Fall of the House of Usher* a Southern tale at the core, however theatrically developed?

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Poe is the only poet, so far as I know, who is on record as the defender of human slavery. It must not be forgotten that he grew up in a slave-holding State. There are traces of cruelty in Poe, of patience with cruelty, easy to find. The Black Cat could not have been written except by a man who knew cruelty well and was hardened to it. The Pit and the Pendulum belongs in the same class. It is not any one of these items, but the mass of them, that counts. The morbid, melancholy, dark, grewsome, terrible, in Poe, seem to me to be related to his environment; these things sympathize with the South, in all lands, with Italy and Spain; as the Spaniard is plain in Cervantes, it may well seem that the Southerner is manifest in the temper of Poe's imagination, characterization, incident, atmosphere, and landscape. His

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tendency towards musical effects is also to the point. So Lanier tried to obtain such effects from landscape, trees, and the marsh, though Poe is free from Lanier's emotional phases, in which he seems, like Ixion, embracing the cloud.

Such, in brief, are some of the reasons that may justify one in seeing in Poe a great expression of the Southern temperament in letters. He certainly is the lone star of the South; and yet it may eventually prove that the song of Dixie is the most immortal contribution that the South has given to the national literature.

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THE West has ever been a name for romance, for the place of discovery, of the marvels of nature feeding the expectant and roused curiosity of those who break in on great solitudes, of heroic human forces put forth to take possession and to go on; and never in man's history was the panorama of the retreating horizon disclosed so swiftly, with such spectacular changefulness, as in the opening of the American continent, when veil after veil withdrew—the dense wilderness of the Genesee and the southward timberland, the open

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prairies of the vast river-country, the long roll of the plains of the Sunflower trail, the mountains, the deserts, till at last, with descents of loveliness, the scene debouched at the Golden Gate of the Pacific. Never since the Hellenes first looked on the Mediterranean had there been such a moment of beauty and power in the great human migration. Immensity and diversity strove with each other in the century-long revelation. To our backward look the land is full of adventurous experience; the river-voyagers, the fur-traders, the explorers, the gold-hunters are like nomadic waves over it; the Indian is hardly more than an incident, like antelope and buffalo, so much is the imagination taken with the white man's life in such surroundings. It is of this national *mise-en-scène*, this race-energy, that those old-fashioned

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writers thought who used to demand of us a literature "on the same scale as the country." But no nation yet ever produced literature in the time of its settlement on the soil, and our history conforms to this old record. The legend-breeding time has gone, and no legend yet appears; and in its place has come, all glamour scattered, the West that is built in the love of home more than in the love of gold, banded by railways, knotted with great cities, and filled far and wide with the peace of natural labor, domesticity, education; and the land settles to its rest.

Argonaut or pioneer, early or late, of whatever stripe of adventurer, the first wanderers were no makers of books. The scientific explorers left important works of the highest interest in their sphere, but they owned neither the style

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nor the matter of literature. History waited for Parkman. The part that books held in the farms, villages, and towns which grew up in the settlement was the same as in the original communities from which the emigrants came. The broad northward sweep of the New England trail was thick with the transplanted pulpit, school, and ideas of the old Puritan coast; the stream from Pennsylvania and the Southeast was less marked with intellectual traits. Literature was still an instrument of the practical life, including morality in that term; it fed the sermon, informed the political debate, and gathered especially about the newspaper press and the numerous growth of feeble and short-lived periodicals. Certain regions were especially favored, in particular the country of the Western Reserve in northern

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Ohio and a little tract of Indiana where, within a county's breadth, were born the greater number of Western writers who achieved reputation in the second half of the last century. There was, too, a Unitarian outpost at Louisville, in Kentucky, and a literary spirit there and an opportunity for education, which made that the most cultivated city of the South beyond the Alleghanies, though it was still too nigh the Southern blight to reap to the full the fruits of early advantage. Poe, by virtue of his journalistic interest, reached farther with the circle of his correspondence than any of his contemporaries, and he touched St. Louis, on the extreme hem of possible literary enterprise.

Throughout all this area school, seminary, academy, college, and what has since grown into the University, were

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part and parcel of the life of the State, the denominations and the ambitious and enterprising youth; and light belles-lettres, such as Prentiss cultivated and Thomas collected, fluttered pale and premature in the complaisant press; but there was no true original growth. The literature of tradition, used for traditionary purposes in traditionary ways, was still the only literature with mastering power; what was newly produced was either compounded of the old or weakly imitated it. As the settlement moved farther West, towards and beyond the great barriers, the intellectual life took on more and more the character of missionary enterprise, such as Starr King stood for in California. In those vast stretches, under a sky that of itself would have generated again the heavenly Zeus in a pre-Christian race,

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amid a land where elemental grandeurs are closer to mankind than they have been since the primitive world, the imagination remained unstirred to expression, and the book carried into the waste was the Mormon Bible. It is not strange. It is only one more manifestation of the fact that a race which has begun to write is already old; literature flowers only from a stock long planted in the earth; it may be carried to a new soil, but it bears the true blossom of that soil only after centuries of absorption. Literature as an instrument of the practical life the West always had in full measure, as the coast colonies had possessed it and employed it; imagination, in its practical function to plan a nation, and in its sympathetic activities to bind society together, and with the past and future, it also had and used; but the ideal

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imagination, the power to recast truth and remake the world, had not arrived in the West, nor, indeed, has it ever arrived there. The whole great country, with all its civilization, its prosperity, its education—all its immeasurable success in the practical sphere of what is necessary and wholesome for the entire life of man in body and mind—has not produced so much in literature for the world as have the Russian steppes; and, like Turgenieff, Bret Harte lived abroad, and Joaquin Miller, like Tolstoi, was a hermit-dreamer at home.

The earliest stir of original literary impulse in the West was by way of humor. The population was a gathering of strongly marked race-types from many lands, a museum and nursery of incongruities; the new environment was an added element of contrast in a so-

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ciety quickly adapting itself to changed and strange conditions; freedom of life gave the rein to forceful eccentricity and to weakness of foible and foolishness. Many a man found his true character in a day, who, under the pressure of social convention, insincere profession, and the general tyranny of what was expected of him, might in his birth-place never have suspected his own existence; and no effective secrecy was possible in the all-revealing air of that character-testing struggle. Under such circumstances humor emerged as a saving grace. Laughter was bred into the people; it solved many situations, it lessened the friction of close personal contact, it made for peace, being the alternative for ill-nature or a blow. The constancy of it shows its spontaneity. In the camps of the miner, on the river steam-

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boats, in the taverns of the court circuit, there sprang up inexhaustible anecdotes, rallies of wit, yarns, and fanciful lies and jokes on the dullard or the stranger. If it be true that our unliterary humorists were rather a newspaper product of the East, and that they took origin from some of these same elements, it was, nevertheless, in the West that American humor most flourished, for there the conditions were found united. It was as if all the world had gone on a picaresque journey by general consent in various quarters, and at the chance round-up for nightly rest and refreshment fell to telling what, and especially whom, they had met with. Out of this atmosphere came Lincoln, our greatest practical humorist, with that marvellous power, turning all he touched to wisdom; and on the free, imaginative side, Mark Twain,

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our capital example, was blood and bone of this Western humor. He is its climax, although, fun for fun's sake being his rule, he often goes sprawling, for fun seldom stands alone; for long life it has to mate with something, to blend with other elements, as in the great humorists. Truth must touch it, as in Lincoln's case, or character, as in Shakespeare's, before it goes home to the mark. In its living forms in the West, character was always near to it, and a Franklin-like lesson was often its honey. Extravaganza is a kind of practical joke on the mind, and with other practical jokes falls to a secondary place. Humor that mixes with the truth of life is the better bread. In the West there was one omnipresent element with which it had natural affinity—the quality of picturesqueness. This existed in all

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forms, in character, incident, and setting. It was a foregone conclusion that when the artist came he would combine these — humor and picturesqueness — with each other, and both with romance.

The artist came in Bret Harte. He was not, like Mark Twain, born of the stuff in which he worked. His art is not that of the native life becoming conscious of itself and finding original expression. He was a visitor from the outer world, Eastern-born and Eastern-bred. The son of a Greek professor who taught in a college at Albany, in New York, he grew up in a library, bred on literature from boyhood, when alone such breeding takes, with his brain stuffed carelessly with the best English humor and romance, and, indeed, if Don Quixote, Gil Blas, The Arabian

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Nights, and Tales of the Genii be added, the best in the world. Still a stripling youth, he was flung into the Californian ferment, impressionable and sharp to observe, with eyes trained on contemporaneous man under the tutelage of the art of Dickens, with its large resources of comedy, sentiment, and kindliness. He had shown the literary gift from childhood; he could meditate his experience, brood over his creatures and love them, and his skill in language was fine to serve his ends. The relaxed moral strain of convention about him loosed his tongue and let him have his say of the thoughts and feelings within him. The environment was crowded with artistic elements, and he began to select, with directness and simplicity, and combine and create; and, without knowing it, he had found the gold that

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grows not dim and melts not away. His graphic power was great; the vividness of the scenes, the sharpness of the character, the telling force of the incident, the reality of the talk, the simple depth of the sentiment, made up a body of human truth, clear, picturesque, sincere, and homespun, which went at once to the heart.

It is maintained, perhaps generally, that Bret Harte's tales are pure inventions, and that what he describes had no actual existence in the mining country. He himself asserted the contrary, saying that he found in reality the starting-point of both character and incident; and I believe him. The limitations of his genius lead me to do so. He lacked power of the sort that constructs and feeds from fecund observation and sympathy a great novel;

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though he accomplished all that his specific material was capable of, in verse, his poetry is tame when he leaves his peculiar ground; his distinction lies in his short tales, and he continued through life to work the same narrow vein; this argues adherence to a known subject, dependence on experience and memory, the presence of a basis of actuality. A free imagination, in the sense of irresponsible invention, would have been less trammelled.

Indeed, it is Bret Harte's artistic truth that constitutes the novelty and charm of his work, and makes its way in the wide world, far from the cañons where it was cradled. It has democratic power. The vital persistence of human nature in men and women, the primitive emotions and virtues of our kind still instinctively put forth, to com-

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fort and support life in comradeship, independent of civilization left behind, and institutions dropped out, and the habits of orderly society disused—the man in his natural manhood, the woman in her natural womanhood—this is the core of the life he sets forth; and the human qualities in his tales have their brilliancy of tone and effect, because they are so disengaged from convention, institution, use and wont, and show the clear grain. Character is the mark he aims at, and unless character has truth, it is naught. He had seen men in undress; and though he noticed the costume and the drawl, the shabby or miserable detail, still, for his eyes, the man remained, and was the absorbing object of his interpreting art. This is, in literature, to have democratic power.

With it goes the philanthropic instinct,

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the wish to bring out the man hidden there, obscure in the caking of circumstance, of the working-day world, of slovenliness, of vice and crime, and to make him appear in his original human nature, above the drudge, the loafer, the criminal that he is to the casual eye and the hard mind. Toleration, which goes hand-in-hand with personal liberty, and is its unfailing companion, is a necessary ingredient in this human art—the art, it need hardly be said, of Dickens, for Bret Harte derives from Dickens as plainly as Irving from Goldsmith, and Cooper from Scott, and he gracefully acknowledged his indebtedness. It is those who condemn the art of Dickens as tawdry, sentimental, deformed by caricature, that see no reality in Bret Harte. The same persons sneer at the whole range of humane effort from black

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suffrage to criminal reform as sentimentality, and have yet to learn the lesson of democracy—so hard is it for the artificial man, who, even in a republic, is the man of a caste, to believe that God has sown human nature as wide as the daisies, as numerous as the waves, and made earth noble with its multitude as the heaven with stars.

Bret Harte represents indestructible courage and love as natural elements in man's bosom, shown in action and self - forgetful virtue, and always respected by the on - lookers, however vulgar, unkempt, debauched; and he blends this eternal moral with comedy, and even grotesqueness, without tarnishing it. The West gave him all the human garniture of the scene in character, incident, and the action's glow; and it must be believed, too, that

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as in local color he was faithful to his material, he was also a true representative of the Western spirit in this democratic, philanthropic, tolerant art, by means of which his youthful temperament, highly cultivated by letters as it had been, found imaginative embodiment. This humorous romancer, gentle, tender, hospitable, and just, so finely sensitive to the unspoken pathos of the hard, starved, brutal lot of the miner's life, was, in spirit as well as in the literal facts, an exponent of the new world's story—an American in every fibre. Otherwise his reputation would hardly have exceeded the limits of his editorial-room, and spread not only through the East, but abroad. England would not have continued to read his writings after his own land had tired of them. He made a universal appeal,

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though working always through a local type of no great range of character or adventure; he did this by fidelity to primitive human feelings in natures so deep and simple that their profound truth almost escapes observation in the powerful impression they make, and, of course, much is masked by his artistic method. He is more than the sketcher of a passing phase of pioneer days in the gold mountains; that would be little enough; he created lasting pictures of human life, some of which have the eternal outline and pose of a Theocritean idyl. The supreme nature of his gift is shown by the fact that he had no rival and left no successor. His work is as unique as that of Poe or Hawthorne.

One other author bears the characteristics of the West on his imagination. Joaquin Miller had the endowment of a

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poet, and has taken up into his verse the physical atmosphere of the great solitudes, and the free career of life led amid them. The ranges, the deserts, the sweep of the plains, the flood of burning light, the glory of color, are all caught in his framing lines; the startling phenomena of torrent and blazing prairie, and the sudden catastrophes of the cattle-lands are there; the scene, illimitable and lonely, where life is but a speck, is mirrored both physically and in feeling; but often his muse itself seems lost in the vastness. His gift is lyrical, not dramatic, and nature is more than man in it; yet the human life he renders is also appropriate. It is a life that is only the passion of living, a loose of energy, unbridled, fearless, maddened by its own liberty; its body is sensation, or such action as is only sensation in an-

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other form—an intoxication with the stream of life flowing through the man; it is clear emotion, and laughs at all convention and restraint—the freedom of the outlaw, the filibuster, the desperado. So far as there is any specific local color, the Spanish-Mexican predominates in both landscape and character; and the latter, except in the point of passion, is rather an affair of the accoutrements—the horse is more than the man. He is a riding poet, of course; the lope of the prairie is in his fine lines, and is the best part of them. There is a clear, poetic power here, atmospheric, pictorial, deep-breathed; one wonders at the seeming barrenness, not to say paucity, of the result. The whole is a monotone; there is the same lover, the same maiden—the same wild grandeur of nature, the same sense of the infinite

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in both, the universe without and the passion of living beating within, and this harmony of combination once established is never varied from, though sometimes it is given by fragments instead of in its completeness.

The part of Byron in it is manifest, for Joaquin Miller goes back to Byron, as Bret Harte does to Dickens; and if it is curious to observe Byronism, the offspring of continental despairs, stamp an image of itself, in however lower a degree, in the untamed life of the West, this is evidence how constant and instinctive in the world of society, under its present conditions, is that mood for which Byronism gave the imaginative and sentimental formulas in all lands of modern civilization. The delight in elemental grandeur, the love of freedom, which were the noblest

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traits of Byron, exist here in less power, or in their less excellent forms; on the human side man is, in this verse, of the pirate type, and woman has Turkish mobility, while the melodramatic pose of both action and passion, and the note of egotistic melancholy, are leading features; such is the literary tradition followed, and it is secondary in the work.

What is primary is easily perceived—the sense of the mighty landscape, the enthusiasm for its great phases, the delight in the adventurous occupations of the men, the lust of life in the wild open; the poet handles these things best because he loves them. The secondary, Byronic elements, enter the verse only to impair it; and this happens especially in the realm of character which turns theatrical. In *The Arizonian*—the most striking portrait—vivid and suggestive

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as much of it is, by means of color, music, and feeling, the poet misses the type, and brings it out flattened and defaced. With Walker in Nicaragua, the best poem, though in Byron's manner, has also a quality of its own, a verve and motion which make it sure of just appreciation; and one cannot help thinking that had it been found in some old French manuscript, as a *chanson* of some Norman filibuster in the pirate African seas, it would be the delight of poets and the treasure-trove of scholars. But there was some lack of power in Joaquin Miller which denied to him the summation of his qualities in the concentrated creative faculty. His monotone, with all its sonority, dulls the ear, as his color wearies the eye; the senses, overtired, cease to act, and the mind has not been awakened. One misses the strong, in-

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tellectual force that lay back of all Byron's work, and the landscapes of Arizona are no substitute for it.

What of reality there was in Joaquin Miller's work it would be a subtle matter to define, for actual things suffer strange transformations in a true poet's mind, without losing their original nature. He loved the Western country with native passion; once, it is true, a will-o'-the-wisp of fame drew him across the Atlantic to wander about the Mediterranean and to pose in London drawing-rooms, but his heart never strayed from its own natural horizon. He is opposed to Bret Harte in one capital point: the latter drew the characters he knew just as he knew them, still in the toils of work, chance, and circumstance, in the bonds of men living together for good or ill, in the necessary ways of social beings; but

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Joaquin Miller endeavored to interpret that ideal of the free life, beyond the toils and out of the bonds, which is one conception of Western opportunity and practice—the life without a rein. The instinct from which the dream springs is fundamental in mankind; it has sent hermits to the desert, yeomen to the greenwood, and gallants to the Spanish Main time out of mind; and on the great plains and in the canyons it has had its adventurers. In literature it belongs especially with that beatification of Nature which took place in the Revolutionary times; and the eagle and the lion and the “noble savage” were supposed to exemplify its blessedness. It is a false dream, because restraint is the law of both man’s power and his happiness; but it has always had its followers, a crew of men longing for it and striving

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after it in the reckless vigor of young manhood; and such men, such a spirit, there were in the Western conquest. Joaquin Miller catches some of the traits, the impulses, the joys of it; but in rendering it by means of the Byron convention, peopling the lone landscape with the operatic ghosts of Conrad and Haidee, he gives such an impression of falsity that what truth there may be escapes. It is only where the touch of personal experience is plain, where the individualization exceeds the power of imitative fancy to conjure, where the horse is felt under the rider, and a man's hand in the grasp of a man, as in the Nicaragua tale, that this life and this spirit realizes itself as something that might have been. Wherever the truth may lie, as to the reality of the inspiration and the interpretation, it will re-

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main Joaquin Miller's peculiar trait that he alone has attempted to transfer to imagination this emotional phase of the West, which lies so nigh to all romancing thoughts of the free life there; if it turns to melodrama in his hands, it should be remembered that it has done the same in the hands of all poets, at all times. Those who are restless under society, and are fond to imagine wild freedom, and to think of its place as in the uncivilized tracts of earth, will continue to find in his verse one passionate record of what they seek.

A third author, Lew Wallace, felt the influence of the romantic West, acting on his historical imagination. *The Fair God*, a story of the Aztecs, holds no great place in our literature; but it was in this tale that the author first exercised his invention, and that it was due to his

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Southwestern experience is certain. Oriental traits are recognizable in Joaquin Miller; there are touches of Arabia in his lines; and the coloring and atmosphere of Arizona and New Mexico, the blend of Spanish antiquity in the landscape, were in some sort a preparation in Lew Wallace for his treatment of the Scriptural times and scenes in the work by which he is known, *Ben Hur*. This story, too, hardly rises into the domain of literature, but the pietistic romance has always been popular in our communities, and should be reckoned with in an account of our literary life. At an earlier date domesticity afforded the substance and sphere of this novel as in *The Wide, Wide World*; but, in Lew Wallace's rendering, history took its place, and, on the whole, the appropriate history. He derives, it is true—for all

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our authors have a sponsor—from Victor Hugo in the main and characteristically, though he lies, of course, also in the general stream of historical fiction; and it would be futile to seek, in his stirring tale of races long gone by, the stamp of Western civilization, except so far as it was absorbed by the West in common with the whole country. But it is not fanciful to find in his impressions of the Western land that original sympathy which, in his genius, was to find so foreign and distant material. Such works as he wrote—and they have been described as apart from all American life—are brooded over in long solitude, and proceed from very deep and elemental impressions of a vast world. It is, at least, noticeable that the third writer of the West was, like Bret Harte and Joaquin Miller, a romancer pure and simple.

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The mood, the point of view, the temperament belong to the Western environment, so far as it is an environment of the imagination, and a great gulf divides these three writers from all others who have been characteristically of that part of the country. They stamp the enduring literature of the early West as romantic to the core. It is true that the settled and civilized West—the West of the railways and the cities and the colleges—has also now produced books; its glades and birds have had their poets, its country towns and travelled roads their novelists, sweet in melody, admirable in realistic rendering, the sincere and honest work of our own generation; but they fall outside the limits of this survey, and may be left to later critics of a new time. Within the limits here maintained, the nascent literature of the West lay

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wholly in the fortunes of these three romancers, each in his sphere of the tale, the poem, and the novel—Bret Harte, Joaquin Miller, and Lew Wallace.

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IF it were true, according to the old saying, which is by some reputed wise, that the nation is happiest which has no history, the same maxim might hold good of a people without a literature; for literature in its great forms is in some sort connected with times of national stress and upheaval, and genius, which is its medium, is made active by a similar unrest and excitement in itself. The secondary character of American literature in its first century, its inferiority in mass and quality to the contemporary productions of England and

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France, is everywhere acknowledged; and the youthfulness of our national life, our absorption in material and professional pursuits, in subduing nature and applying self-government and developing economic and social relations, and generally in finding ourselves, which is the business of youth, besides many other similar considerations, are alleged as concurrent causes of this delayed and incomplete success in literary creation. In any exposition of our national achievements of the last century the fine arts, and among them literature, would occupy a small corner in comparative importance when set in competition with the general results of our total human labor. Perhaps one reason for this, as good as any of those just summarized, is the prosperity, the usually regular and free movement of development, in

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a word, the happiness of the people—the general peace, the absence of revolt, of sudden and profound change in ideal ends, of revolutionary aspiration, of all that makes for desperate battle and deep desire in the spirit of man. Great as our political and social growth has been, powerful and broad as the forces of humanity and freedom have shown themselves, and deepening down with wider inclusions among the whole body politic, the marvellous thing has been the gentleness of the process on the whole; only one principle was “rained in blood,” and the dawn, save for that, was without the traditional “thunder-peal” of a new age. And what is true of national life is true also of individual genius; our men of letters, taken together, have been men of quietness.

The great European movement of the

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last century in literature, on the other hand, was that romanticism which was the blossoming bower where the blood of the Revolution was turned to forms of beauty and passion and marvel; its leaders were restlessly alive, and remote as their work in imagination and intellect and sentiment might be from anything obtusely political or social, verse and prose alike were fed from careers of moral, intellectual, emotional strife, from a movement in the minds of men seeking new gods and revealing new gospels in every part of man's and nature's life. It is a vain task to look for anything corresponding to this in the literature of our era of good feeling, although, as we were an intellectually dependent and colonial-minded people and importers of literary fashions, some traces of the romantic revolution may be

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found in our earlier books; but these are truly "naught," if the scale of the century be applied to them. The early American romance, with which our imaginative prose began, however interesting to ourselves historically and to a literary student as an illustration of taste, was an offshoot of the operatic and sentimental tale, the wonder novel and its congeners in the radical school, and was secondary to the works of Mrs. Radcliffe, Godwin, and Lewis. Charles Brockden Brown's novels, which have resisted resurrection more pertinaciously than any other victim of the publishers' mania for the uncopyrighted, marked a moment, but marked it with a grave instead of an immortality; and Allston, with his thin Monaldi, and the elder Dana, with his Byron-Bulwer stripe, exhaust the list of remembered

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names in fiction till Sir Walter Scott's great tradition of the romantic treatment of history and humble life was taken over by Cooper, who was its earliest and last American master. Meanwhile the classical manner of Addison, both in humor and all else, had survived the extinction of the manor-line at home by transplantation here in Irving and his successors, whose pleasantness in letters has continued to the days of Curtis and Warner. These three strands of the early pseudo-romance, the historical romance, and the Addisonian light essay, constitute our characteristic borrowings from the mother-country, and they are all in prose. In poetry there was no such appropriation; Shelley and Keats, Tennyson and Browning, Swinburne and Rossetti, have found no continuance here in any native work of enduring

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worth, and the same is true of later prose authors of England. On the small scale, and among our minor writers, there has been imitativeness in tone and theme; there have been little Dickenses and even little Mrs. Hemanses, the Matthews and Sigourneys of our middle period; but in the main and on the part of our national writers the English tradition has been incorporated in our literature by a broad academic culture from the past rather than by immediate and conscious imitation and transference in the present day.

Our colonial dependence in literature, in fact, has not been so pre-eminently English as is commonly thought. It has been far more a European matter than is appreciated. Longfellow, our first poet of culture, is the representative case; and his service in making Conti-

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mental poetry known in this country is too much neglected. To others, as to him, the past, whose charm won on the imagination and affections, was one of the castled Rhine, of lovely Italy, of romantic Spain, of French cathedral towns, and the picturesqueness of Holland, quite as much as of the mother-country. The German influence was dominant in transcendentalism at Boston, and the long line of Dante scholars, from George Ticknor to Charles Norton at Harvard, is significant of a live tradition in poetic outlook and taste; and the mention of Ticknor, with his history of Spanish literature, recalls the curious closeness of Spain to our own literary land, in the histories of Prescott and Motley, and from Irving to Lowell. Howells, too, has in his earlier days borrowed from Italy for description and

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literary history, and in his later career has done, in some measure, for Continental contemporary fiction what Longfellow did for the treasures of verse, and in our own fiction the tribute of *The Marble Faun* to Italy is a supreme instance of international gratitude. It is to be observed that this connection with the Continent, so natural, so continuous, so radiant with what it gave to us, was one through culture, either literary or artistic, and not one through action; it was the past of these lands, not their present—the antiquity, learning, and sentiment of their past, not the romanticism of their still vital present—that attracted the American interest, except in the late and single case of Howells in fiction; and of this culture and its effects in art and taste, Longfellow, as has been said, was the clear star. Try as he

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might to be American in theme, in Hiawatha, Evangeline, Miles Standish, and the New England Tragedies, and in many shorter pieces, his art owed its simplicity, its mellowness, its adequacy, its golden success, to this culture working out in the new soil of an American nature, its refined charm in expression. This same power of culture, less perfect because more exclusively English, gave dignity to Lowell's verse, and matter also to his prose. It was brain-culture, through contact with the old books of the world, and with what then passed for neoplatonic and Oriental thought, which gave atmosphere to Emerson's universe. Wherever the subject be taken up, it will be found that what is called our colonialism is very much misapprehended if it be thought of as an English tie only; we

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have not been in this century intellectually an English colony, but we have been deeply indebted for impulse and guidance, for outlook and method, for a thousand subtly shaping influences, to all the world beyond seas, where both thought and life are old. It is singular that our recognizable dependence on France seems so slight; it is, perhaps, only to be seen in Henry James.

It would appear, then, that our literature has been sundered from the great movement of romanticism abroad and its incarnations of democracy, philanthropy, and science, its experiments and pilgrimages; and that our contact with the Continent has been with its past in history, sentiment, poetic form, critical canon, artistic impression and the like, from which our men of letters derived culture, and a certain dignity and grace

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of literary demeanor, in the scholarly group of which Irving, Longfellow, and Lowell are typical names. But if sun-dered, the nation has had a life of its own, less turbulent and perplexed, less liable to chaotic and eccentric motions, less on the grand scale of internal battle and social upheaval, but rather a life of assured self-command, intelligent and slow change, conservative in its essence.

If one forgets Wordsworth, he will become aware more surely in Bryant of the crystalline horizons, the clear-seen mountain lines, and the bald hill-sides of our rugged but ether-bathed landscape; and will find something of the elemental in nature portrayed in his poems with a severity and grand simplicity that befit the new land yet uninhabited save by the far-off water-fowl; it is an original, powerful, almost Biblical note, fit to be

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the first verse of our chapter. Something of the same simplicity, serenity, ascetic power, but belonging rather to air than earth, as if granite were spiritualized into light, there is in Emerson, as elemental in the sphere of thought as Bryant in that of nature; and it is not in the bleakness of one or the awkwardness of the other that the American quality is found, but in this simplicity which is so absolute and basal as almost to evade statement, and in their vision and thought, rendered in literature, is what Grant and Lincoln are, rendered in character.

Emerson was intellectually cultured, as was said above; but his power of expression in poetry was lacking in fluidity, roundness, and ease; his poetry, artistically, is Byzantine in its crudity, like his very figure, so stiff, so serious, so

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formal in its formlessness; but that is the accident of the body; the insight, the imagination, the flash of originality from within or of beauty caught from without, make the inwardness of the verse, and judged by the great qualities of the spirit, and especially by that greatest one of an absolute unconscious simplicity, Emerson's poetry pierces heaven at the highest altitude of all our bards. His prose essays, liberating as they are to the mind and stimulating to the spiritual life, are on a lower level; his patriotic sayings, his great American lines—and no poet has so many, bright as the lightnings of Zeus — are in his verse; but his essays are the flower of transcendentalism, which stood in American life for religious revolt sympathetic with the movement of enlightenment on the Continent, and they are the result of

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that internal conflict consequent on a change in ideals in the spiritual sphere which has so often been the motive power of great works in literature, but was here attended by none of that dark stress which is shown in the Revolutionary poets of all Europe, and even in the life, though not the works, of Cardinal Newman.

The whole transcendental movement, in its literary record, is a striking instance of that absence of turbulence, of desperate battle, and deep desire, in our literature, which has been emphasized as characteristic in our men of letters. In Hawthorne only is there found the sense of spiritual peril, and he presents it objectively and historically as a primary experience in the moral life of the founders of New England, most significantly in *The Scarlet Letter*, and

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again less dramatically and more speculatively in Donatello; but in none of his work is it a religious struggle,—it is a moral catastrophe that he illuminates. Hawthorne is, for this reason, the most profound and vitally spiritual in his expression of human experience, the deepest prober of the breast, of all our authors, whether poets or prose-writers; and he comes to this overmastering interest in sin, rather than crime, and in the operations of conscience and the recovery of the soul through suffering and its entrance on a greater life thereby, because of his American inheritance and environment, his American genius.

Bryant is a fading and almost Ossianic figure, a wintry ghost, to most of us; Emerson and Hawthorne, a figure of light and a figure of darkness, are the companion spirits, American through

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and through, who now seem the greatest American writers of the last century. Longfellow and Lowell, associated together in fame as in life, may find, the one a wider acceptance, the other an academic vogue. Longfellow's poetry is less valued now by the critical class, but it is not likely that his hold on the homes of his countrymen has lessened; the critical class has lost in the sense of refinement, and is dull to the quality of Longfellow; but his trust, his humanity, his hospitality to the joys and sorrows of domestic life, his tenderness, his consolation, his noble nature, his just taste in what to say and what to leave unsaid about the crises of lives, not tragic, but touched with human things that "have been and may be again," his companionableness for souls not over-strenuous, but full of all the pieties of

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life endearing life—these things give him long lease of fame; and within his unemphatic range he has an unsuspected variety, and thereby expresses without weariness, except to the life-jaded, an American nature of such sweetness, refinement, and purity that it has become almost exemplary of an ideal of the literary life on this soil. Lowell has not touched his people to the same degree; he is over-intellectual for some, and has defects of taste which repulse others, and great unevenness; he remains our only critic of the first rank, but in other respects his fame seems a doubtful matter. To these names, with full right, that of Poe is added because of his originality in lyric tone and motive, and its power, now long demonstrated, in this country and abroad; and also because of the peculiar horror of his tales.

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No other name would be suggested as of the first rank in our literature, and therefore worthy to be mentioned in a century's achievement; or if suggested, none would pass unchallenged.

The works of standard authors, accepted by a nation, constitute its true achievement in literature; but in so strict a definition the bulk of writing in any age is lost sight of, and the sense of real performance is less than it should be. There have been hundreds of American writers, and scores of them have been successful novelists, nature-writers, humorists, dramatists, poets; and in a more minute view they would be seen to have contributed much that would deserve recognition in a fuller statement. The novelists after Cooper have given expression to many provincial or metropolitan phases of

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American life, that serve as local transcripts of manners and places and studies of some careers, and these may prove historically interesting; the humorists have caught a distinct flavor from the time, and Mark Twain is their capital type of popular celebrity; and so the other classes, the describers of nature, of whom Thoreau is the leader, the sentimentalists of whom Mitchell is the most enduring, and the others, each with its head, have accomplished success in their day and generation.

In the fields of endeavor that neighbor literature, in history, oratory, state papers, and the like, distinction has been won as high in those provinces of expression as any in the pure literary art. But to examine our literature in this comprehensive way in order to exhibit our true performance would

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be as vain a task as to endeavor to show our inventive genius by a catalogue of the patent-office instead of by those supreme examples which have been gifts to all the world. The national life, it is true, has found expression in many authors besides those of genius, and in many men of literary faculty approaching genius—its moral experience in Whittier, its democratic crudity in Whitman, its later culture in the elder poets still living, its abolished Southern civilization in Uncle Tom's Cabin, its border and mining-camp romance in Bret Harte; but the writers in these cases belong in a secondary class in comparison with Bryant, Irving, Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, and Poe. These last are the authors whom the nation as a whole regards as its great writers in pure literature, and

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none besides. They are themselves in a second class in comparison with the English or French authors of the century; and, in fact, they fall, in almost a solid group, just below the greatest names in English literature, and above all others who are reckoned as second in England, and Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe are unique each in his kind. The work they and those associated with them have done has been distinguished by artistic conscientiousness, to a degree rarely paralleled, and also by purity; no nation has so pure, few so painstaking, a literature; it fails of the highest rank only because it lacks inspiration, passion, that deep stirring of the spirit of man which, with all its cost, is the cause of his highest reach in imagination, intellect, and desire.

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IN the survey of our literature from the point of view of its relations to the country at large, it is impossible to escape a sense of fragmentariness in the products, of disproportion between the literary energy and the other vital powers of the people, and of the inadequacy of literature as a function of national expression. Its geographical distribution is uneven, and reflects the movement of population; its seat has been mainly in the Northeast; in power of interpretation of social life it had depth in New England only, and as it spread southward and

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westward it grew in superficiality. . . Humor alone is native to the whole country: and hence, perhaps, Mark Twain, in that sphere, most nearly approaches the position of a national writer, though he is characteristically Western in his origins and his mind, as Holmes, much more narrowly, belongs to the extreme East, and is there the member of a provincial caste. But there has been no national author in the universal sense; no man moulded so American in genius as to appeal to all parts equally, and to express the common nature either by an intense spiritual concentration or by diverse representation. Our literature is rightly described as a sectional product, in a stage lying beyond its original colonial condition, it is true, but not advanced to national unity; and here again it reflects the fact that our politi-

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cal union preceded that community of mental and moral culture, of ideas, beliefs, purposes, of deep decisions and fundamental agreements, which is still, in relation to the whole country, partial and approximate only.

The clefts in the nation are intellectual and moral, but they exist; and our literature, in its history, discloses their direction and depth. Its absorption by the people still has geographical and racial limitations, not to be overcome in our day by this elder group of writers. In America the literary historian has to deal with a transplanted civilization which originally allowed widely varying degrees of culture both in the different ranks of society and territorially; the extent of the country, in connection with other causes, enabled these initial diversities between South and North,

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border and sea-coast, to resist unification in such general and prevailing homogeneity as really subsisted in all. Under these conditions it was inevitable that our literature should be produced in local centres, and make an imperfect appeal in its own day, and be taken into the common consciousness with incomplete and uneven success by the nation in its length and breadth. It is, indeed, rather by this formative influence in entering into national life, in the process of time, than by its origin out of such a life that our literature becomes broadly indigenous; but it is hardly to be thought that the exponents of old New England or of the new West—especially in view of the great and continuing historic rift in principle, sentiment, and memory which separates the South from a free participation in our moral and imagina-

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tive life—will become national even with the lapse of years. Our first authors represent an historic moment of great interest, a new literary beginning; they express the mutually excluding social spheres in which they were bred, and taken together they include all native imaginative life that was to find permanent embodiment. It belonged to the environment that, in so far as they were American, they should be sectional.

It was also inherent in the conditions that the literary continuers of a transplanted civilization should hark back to the times and lands of its origins and home. The tie of paternity is stronger than the fraternal bond, and nearer of kin; and the minds of our writers were more at ease in conversing with their intellectual ancestors than with their fellow-citizens. It was a fortunate inci-

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dent of our separation from the mother-country that our men of letters naturally went not only to the English tradition but to Continental literatures with more freedom and directness; had Longfellow and Emerson been born in England it is unlikely that the one would have stamped his art so broadly with the Continent or the other have so Orientalized the surface of his thought. Intimate as was the English inheritance, it is, nevertheless, true that the conscious impact of the past on our literary men was largely through immediate contact with the other literatures of Europe as they had been moulded by the Renaissance, the Gothic revival, and the Romantic revolt; our direct obligation to Greek and Latin was slight and is negligible; but we touched the broad stream of Occidental culture, in the first

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half of the last century, not through England only, but from the Baltic to Lisbon and Shiraz.

This ancient and rich literary past was the source of our artistic tradition, and the sense of its dignity and preciousness was always great in the scholars among our writers, and nearly all of them were scholarly men. They lived habitually in it, they learned from it, they emulated its works. In other words, they had the academic mind. They were but partly naturalized even in the country in which they were born; they were sharers in the cosmopolitanism of the modern world, and it was forced on them by the state of American culture. They were citizens of a wide world of letters; even in their patriotic endeavors they owned and obeyed another allegiance to truth and art, to the republic of letters, to the uni-

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versal human spirit; and this was their natural lot because they were compelled to seek their literary inheritance in an age before American letters began to be. This was, for them, to take the academic point of view; and whether they did this from choice or under the compulsion of circumstances, the limitation thus imposed on them is often thought of as disqualifying their Americanism. In so far as they continued the literary tradition in its original shape, as if it had never been transplanted, it is said that they were not of the pure, native soil.

The academic point of view is nothing more than an ever-present sense of the hand of the past in literature—that hand which, through the whole range of the vital energies of society, is felt, perhaps, at first as compelling and restrictive,

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but at last as salutary and saving, for it is the racial will, abiding from the past in us, which has formed not only our bodies in stature and favor, but the habits of the soul in action. The literary power of tradition is inherited, half in our instincts and early affections, and half in our books of counsel and example; the academic mind is one that masters this tradition and is mastered by it, and has thus become a race-mind with different degrees of fulness and faculty. To know the past of artistic power, to be imbued with its moods and instructed in its methods, to become familiarized with its great works in the human spirit, and to bring from them the true perspective that must be applied to the recent and rising world of letters, is the highway of criticism; so it has been built from the first. Our authors in

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submitting themselves to this education in the literature of that civilization of which America is but a forward branch, neither injured their genius nor lessened their power. They were on the road that great poets have always followed. Who can think they would have been happier had they chosen to forget Uhland and Dante, Hafiz and Plotinus, Scott and Pope and Keats, and remember only the Bay Psalm-Book, Edwards and Franklin, Freneau and Brown; or, literature apart, to look only on the lilacs in the door-yard, and the wood-chopper, the fisherman and the itinerant Yankee, or what of nobler form—Monadnock, Washington or Decatur, Massasoit or Pontiac—there might be? They did not slight the American material in their age; rather they clung to it with unhappy tenacity; but their power to

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deal with it—and this is a more important because more comprehensive debt than any obligation for theme or atmosphere—they obtained from their education in the old humanities. Art is not self-made; its breeding is from far-off ages now; it is, in literature, one of the oldest possessions of the race; and the poet who thinks to sing, as the linnet sings, by the mere chipping of its egg, will have a linnet's fame. In taking possession of all the literature of their civilization that they could get, our early authors, so far from finding a limitation, found an enfranchisement. It is true, no doubt, that in this they passed beyond the native culture of their own country; they departed from what was common to the State; and, in so far, they were not Americans in the provincial sense.

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They derived from their academic education the artistic point of view, This characterized them and differentiated them from their countrymen engaged in quite other occupations. The rawness of American life on the broad scale, the vulgarity of its surface of manners and the fierceness of its money-getting exploitation of the country—greater probably than ever afflicted so large a territory—survive perceptibly only in our books of humor, but they were very real. When the most liberal allowance has been made for caricature and prejudice and a bad temper, the observations of Mrs. Trollope and Dickens, and even the coarse diatribe of Moore, are blabbing tales. The Hard-cider Campaign is a landmark for the first irruption of Western roughness, like a back-water wash, upon the more staid

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and respectable communities of the East, where, perhaps, is then to be found the ending of old colonial reverential ways. But without drawing into memory again the things in which national oblivion delights, it is plain to any student of our social history that these men of letters lived very much protected lives, in little circles of their own, apart from the mass of their fellow-citizens. They were, as a whole, gentle-born and college-bred; they were the late fruition of a slowly matured refinement in their separate communities; and life in them had come to that perfection where the artistic point of view—the desire for moral order, sensuous beauty, and emotional harmony—was natural, and the will to find these things, to create them, effectual. The local circles in which they dwelt, and of whose members they were

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representative, were a small portion of the thriving and driving American world.

Artists in their work, however, they were determined to be. They were very conscious of this purpose, and they exhibit something that may be called the timidity of the scholar, a feeling of the presence of the model and of the eye of the master. This was the weak point in their academic dependence, and accounts for the plentiful vein of imitativeness that belongs to all young literatures in their learning times. Some of them never really laid aside this touch of inferiority, however unreal it was in fact. In Lowell, who, perhaps more than any other, was so abundant in faculty and power that he makes the impression of a man unequal to his own genius, there is felt constantly the neigh-

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borhood of a stylist; in his odes, for example, it is the greater neighborhood of Dryden; in the later lyrics it is the smaller neighborhood of Dobson; *The Biglow Papers*, on the other hand, is the notable instance of intrinsic originality, certainty, mastery; yet even there he could not get along without his prefaces. Cooper is the pupil of Scott, Irving of the essayists, and even Emerson is not without the echo of seventeenth-century short-rhymed verse, a hard, ringing coinage not easily deceiving the ear. Longfellow acquired foreign poetic manners, but he was native to their graces and wore them as his own rather than by adoption; he Americanized all that he brought home either from travel or fireside study. Poe, who drew his talent to the dregs, displayed in his art that cold calculation which was also an element in

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his life. Hawthorne, the purest artist of all, was least a pupil and soonest a master. All, in their different ways and degrees, worked out an artistic method by which they meant to represent, to interpret, and to unveil the human spirit. They were concerned not with the apparent, but the real; not with the transitory, but the eternal; and, excepting Poe, they were all artists of the beautiful.

They also adopted, in common, to make a third definition, the romantic point of view; and if by their cultivation of refined beauty they were set apart from the mass of their countrymen, it might be thought that they intensified this remoteness by departing as far from American actuality as the spirit of romance could convey them. They obeyed the compulsion of the time. Romanticism

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ruled the literary world abroad. Travel of itself is always a main source of romance. It is the realist who must have a home-keeping mind, in order to obtain that familiarity with the life he depicts which is required for truthfulness. The romancer is free of all the world; if he bides in his native village, like Thoreau, he finds Italy, Egypt, Siberia there; if he strays through the broad world, the marvel of nature, the ruin of history, the passion of life are his discoveries. Irving in the Alhambra, Longfellow by the belfry of Bruges, Taylor in the footways of Palestine are characteristic figures; to their instincts, their native deficiencies, their outgoing spirits, Europe, visible and in history, was as much a realm of romance as the forest of Broceliand to mediæval knighthood; when they returned home they found ro-

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mance sitting by the shores of the New World.

America was romantic from the first. I presume it is with others as with myself; classical beauty leaves me contemplative; romantic beauty incites me. The spirit of life in America is an incited spirit. In Hawthorne's American themes the encircling wilderness of Puritanism, the life of the decaying generation, the aspiration of the reformers, were romantic; so were the forest of Cooper's Pathfinder, the Hiawatha year, and the idealizations of his country that Lowell shaped in the Washers of the Shroud and elsewhere. In atmosphere, faith, and passion alike, romance has been our genius; it continued so in Bret Harte's picturesqueness and Joaquin Miller's arid sublimity. The romantic spirit in our authors was fed, too,

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not only from contemporary literature—the European wave of the time—but from its fountain-heads. These men went to the great works of the race. They translated Homer, Dante, and Faust; Longfellow gathered the spoils of the saga and ballad, and Lowell grew familiar with *trouvère* and *troubadour*. In the most vivid autobiographical word he ever wrote, he said of this experience:

“I was the first who ever burst
Into that silent sea.”

Emerson appropriated, as best he could, Persian image and atmosphere through Von Hammer. History sympathized with them in Prescott and Motley. To these must be added the infusion of German philosophy in the transcendentalists, with Hedge as their centre of learning, not without satellites, and

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the re-birth of old English and the ballads which Child accomplished. It is simple truth to say that the literatures of the world were never better known, more intelligently, more variously, more richly, than in Cambridge at that time. But if our authors, by their foreign contact and artistic sense, departed from the body of the people, on this side of romantic prepossession they found reunion with the national spirit; the planting of the colonies, the Revolution, and the war for the Union were romantic causes; the freeing of the negroes and the experiments of socialistic reorganization, that everywhere in one or another form dotted the land, were romantic dreams. If there was any solvent that could have fused these men with their country, it was romantic art; here they were at one with the people,

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as in their culture and their artistic ripening they were in advance of the common life.

Such are some of the causes of the lack of correspondence between our earlier literature and American life, in its sectional and foreign aspects and in its artistic quality. The aloofness that their work takes on, when viewed in relation to the whole country, either in its own period or now, is very tangibly felt, and it increases in proportion as the work rises in the scale of art, thought, and culture, in Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, Irving. In the case of these men the habitancy of their minds was in the past of literature, the abstract moral or æsthetic sphere, the glamor of foreign horizons; they knew America as a part, but not the whole, of life; they were all sons of an older civilization, keenly

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conscious of an earlier home, and even in their late age still planters of the mind in a new world. In consequence of this, they appealed broadly, at best, to but one strain of the founding blood.

It is not surprising, under such circumstances, that they should rapidly grow old-fashioned. They are, in fact, farther off from our growing youth than would readily be conceived; they are less near than their English contemporaries, for example. The tradition which they accepted and emulated was necessarily in them a second-hand affair, and not only were they, to this extent, belated Goldsmiths, Scotts, Keatses, Drydens, and Dantes, but their Americanism itself, in so far as they consciously sought it in topic, was a matter of the now remote past, of the colonies, the Indians, the border, of things and conditions

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whose picture and sentiment are now historical; and, in the graver and the æsthetic sphere, the transcendentalism of Emerson, the sentimentality of Poe, the balladry of Longfellow—who lived in the age of Uhland—the classicism of Lowell, the rusticity of Whittier, the boarding-house of the Autocrat, are far-off things. The speed with which these authors, in the mass of their work, retire into quiescence while their acceptance becomes conventional, is not an illusion; the change goes on apace. Their reputations gained enormously by the fewness of the band. If one swallow does not make a summer, yet he is listened to more than many swallows. If these authors were not our own, and if they were not, furthermore, all of our own, would there be so many books written about them, I wonder? To me they still seem

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a troop of pilgrims, taking up their singing march in our springtide and morn-tide, but much apart in their May-making, psalm-singing, and story-telling; they recede more and more from life. There is something pathetic in their artistic loneliness in their own time, something more pathetic in their fading away in ours; for their age is gone, as truly as Saadi's and Walther von der Vogelweide's.

The absorption of our literature by the people, nevertheless, has been remarkable, in proportion to its intrinsic worth. Epic and drama, the two greatest literary forms, have been absent from it; so, too, has love-passion, while satire and elegy have been slightly represented. In prose, the range of character has been narrow, the element of plot inconspicuous, and the most consistent

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and varied success has been achieved in the short story, sketch, and tale. The themes have been domestic life, religious feeling, public causes—in which are to be included all pieces of a patriotic motive—and that phase of history which may be described as the legend of our origin in all parts of the country. The nearness of these topics to the people governs its appropriation of the work, in varying degrees; and the simple, spontaneous, direct style of the writing, which is also the people's style, is a controlling factor in getting acceptance for the work. In the style is to be found the most characteristic national trait; the themes of the affections and of religion belong to universal human life; local color, historic substance, and the passion of loyalty to our ideas and institutions are national elements.

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Our literature, so absorbed, has been effectual within the natural limits of its appeal. Its path in the land has been identical with the path of the power of civilization and the mastering national force; it has been less accepted in the South, which is antipathetic to the national spirit and genius, and it is less readily received by the foreign elements in the population, though large portions of these have been prepared for sympathy and understanding in regard to it by being imbued with Revolutionary hope. In spite of all deductions, it has done its work as a leaven and power in the nation, and will long continue to operate in a diminishing degree. The extent to which Emerson, for example, who was the most purely American of all, has entered into national life by sustaining independence, self-reliance, and

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perfect courage in freedom of opinion, which most constitute the American way of behavior, is incalculable, while, at the same time, he has nourished ideality of aim and the conviction of a divine meaning in the world which are also broadly characteristic of the free American temper. The power of our literature falls within the limits of the idea of democracy, but that idea it has companioned through the century; it has remained close to the common life, the common religion, the fortunes of the common people in the State, and has thrown over the State historical romance and inspirited it with ideal purpose for humane ends. Our past is contained in it.

In the historical field, where the American material and color of our romance are most plain, the past, of ne-

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cessity, either perishes or is preserved for the people in the forms of imagination furnished by its writers, and these forms as now fixed are not likely to be changed or much modified by later authors who may recur to the subject. Colonial, Indian, and border life have become largely literary, and are seen through literature, rather than actual, seen through history; the record, it is true, is accessible to the scholar, but for the people imagination serves, as it is in Hiawatha, Arthur Dimmesdale, Leatherstockings, and Roaring Camp. The Dutchman, the Puritan, and the pioneer have found imperfect types, an incomplete, and largely legendary interpretation, but such it is.

In the ethical field a similar prominence belongs to those ideas of democracy which have been most influential in working

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out the political and moral faith of the nation and which appear in the poetry of Lowell, Emerson, and Whittier especially. If the nation be regarded in its diversity and extent, it may be questioned whether the welcome given to these ideas, great as it is, has been so widespread as to entitle it to be called national; but if the nation be regarded in its unity and core of life, and in its historic efficiency, a different answer may be given, for this welcome has come from the ruling and dominant class, from that part of the people which has led in making history and spreading institutions on those same principles which gave the nation birth. It seems unlikely that this intense and elevated strain, which belongs characteristically to New England poets, appeals in the way literature ought to appeal—that is, sympa-

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thetically and spontaneously—to many Americans not of the original stock of the North, except the English emigrants of this century, and their children, who were of a similar breed. The number of such descendants of the first colonists is many millions, and they belt the North across the Continent; but they are only a portion of the whole people. Certainly the readers, who find their own unconscious being expressed in the ideas of these poets, are fewer than those who absorb without difficulty the literary interpretation of our history.

In connection with this, it is necessary to take account of the vast accretions of our population from foreign lands, of a different ancestry and language from the race which founded the nation and established the genius of the English language and of English institutions as

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the original spring and the necessary fountain of its continuing life, at least for our own ages. Citizens of German extraction, for example, depend, even in the second generation to some degree, upon their own native books, on Goethe and Schiller, and their many minor compatriots, for the sentiment and ideas that flow from literature. Such books have no life in the soil except to supply the mould of the spirit for those who have not been made completely English in language and American in temperament; no foreign book of literary rank has been produced here from such sources. Whether the assimilation of American ideas goes on in the younger generations with anything like the same certainty and penetration as the appropriation of American history and institutional life, may well

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be considered a doubtful matter. The truth is — and here is one reason for the apparent disproportion between our literary energy and our other vital powers — that the function of literature is only partly discharged by our native writers. The situation is not unlike that spoken of as existing in the Puritan colony, where the Bible took the place of all other literature as an instrument of self-expression for the soul that used it in both the intellectual and the emotional or moral life. Not only have our foreign strains a special literature, adapted to their habits and temperaments, and also dear to their affections, which lingers on, but the great English-sprung mass of the people have the literature of England, which makes a racial appeal to them, and is of permanent interest. Dickens and Thack-

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eray, Tennyson and Browning, to speak of the last age, and Scott, Wordsworth, and Burns in the preceding time, not to mention such perennial powers as Shakespeare and Milton, discharge the function of literature for us far more effectually, with greater vividness and diversity than our own writers can accomplish. What the Bible was to the Puritans—the Book of Life—that English literature is to us still; and to it all American writing is essentially supplementary. The place of literature in our national life, as a great function of expression, is not measured either by our own production or our appreciation of it; but spreads deeply and diversely in the uses made of the historic literatures of the world, primary among which for us are the Hebrew and the English.

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The absorption of our literature by nations abroad also offers some indications of its native characteristics. France, from which we have received least in formative power, has derived most from us. Cooper fell in with the taste for romantic naturalism there in his day, and Poe appealed to something racial in the Gallic spirit by virtue of which he found not only acceptance, but imitation; Hawthorne also, though to a far less degree, was made welcome. In Germany there was much the same fortune for Cooper—there seems to be a special affinity in the German race for the forest—and their own romantic schools had prepared the way for Poe and Hawthorne, while they added Longfellow to the favored number. The countries to the north and south show no special trait in their receptivity, and in

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general our authors entered the Continent, as they did England, through their power in the universal human spirit rather than by local qualities in their work.

In England, nevertheless, these last counted in a peculiar way; it was natural that our authors should desire to appear to the manner born and without provincial traits; but, on the other hand, it was also natural that Englishmen should desire to see in their trans-Atlantic kin something, whatever it might be, that constituted native and peculiar character. Our authors sought to conform to the common type of English genius; Englishmen, on the contrary, sought the variation. English judgment frequently persisted in identifying the American genius by its exceptional instances; and in Bret Harte and Joaquin

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Miller, and especially in Mark Twain and the humorists generally, and in Walt Whitman among our poets, was found the new American type. It was felt that our polite literature, as it appeared in those half-dozen names which have shimmered all along these pages like a little string of pearls, told over and over, was not characteristic but a continuation of the old tradition, an English literature transplanted to a new soil, and there thriving in so ancestral a way as scarcely to show the change; rather in these later writers and these unfamiliar forms was the emergence of the new breed of men. Native judgment has not coincided with this view.

Walt Whitman, to take the typical case, is an idealist—all live Americans are idealists—and he exemplifies in literature, in a highly developed

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form, that variety of the American idealist who is a believer in ideas, usually in one idea which he seizes, and is thereupon possessed, and often transported even to living in a fanatical world. Walt Whitman was one of these. The appealing thing in him is the pure primitiveness of the ideas he seized; the arresting thing—to neglect what is merely grotesque in his work—is the boldness of outline and a certain uncramped strength with which he presented these ideas of nature, fraternity, and toil. The ideas themselves are as fundamental in the social world as are the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. In their acceptance abroad as a peculiarly American expression there was an element of preconception; such primitiveness, so loud an emphasis, such a careless defiance of conventions of art and speech,

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belonged to a democracy—it was as Shakespeare might have portrayed it; but to the minds who accepted Whitman, the democrat was still a cousin to Caliban. Whitman had natural poetic force without art; when he forgot his camarado rôle as the democrat vagabond under whose sombrero was all America, he wrote a few fine lyrics; but to foreigners, who find in him the nationality they miss in the old group, the result must be disappointingly small as the type and outcome of three centuries of slowly culminating English toil in a great land; and to us at home, gazing half humorously on, when we take time to think of it with a moment's passing seriousness, it seems only the caricature that deforms truth. So Doré might have drawn us, so Rabelais have humorized us; extravagance of line and laughter

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could go no further. To become what Whitman was, Americans, who, more than Englishmen, are the heirs of all Europe, must first denude themselves of that larger civilization with which they are integral, and be an Ishmael among nations. A poet in whom a whole nation declines to find its likeness cannot be regarded as representative, though he may smack strongly of some raw earth in the great domain. It is more reasonable to find the national literary genius, as a fellow of universal art with its peers, in the appropriation of our best by foreign nations in those authors that are now classical with us, the group in whom we find, as a nation, our past, our ideals, and our daily life of home and heaven.

The literature which has been treated

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here flowered in the first half of the last century, and, except in the late Western blossom, was beyond its prime at the opening of the civil war, in 1860. The complete failure of this literature to establish an American tradition—none of its authors left any successor in the same line—indicates something parasitical in it, as if it were not self fed; a literature fed from European culture we have had, but it does not perpetuate itself in an American culture; and in the change of conditions, apparently, it is only from a new growth that literature may now be anticipated. There is one striking sign that the elder literature has retreated into the past. While it flourished, it had influence upon that large mass of writing which may be called secondary literature, by which is meant the product that arises

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from the practical use of literature as a social instrument—always the larger part in any age, whether in sermon, journal, or magazine. Now the influence runs rather the other way, and journalism and its cognate forms affect the higher modes of literature by enforcing upon it something of its own conditions, standards, and uses. Not to enter in detail upon that period of dubious fame which fills the last quarter of the century, it is plain, for example, that the literary treatment of history, so admirable in our historians of the older time, came to its end in Parkman, the friend and mate of the Cambridge group in its age. The period in question has been filled with fiction, largely from French models, both realistic and romantic, with poetry in which Tennyson, Rossetti, and, among older writers,

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Herrick have been the prevailing foreign types, and with no significant prose other than fiction. The high average excellence of this work has, nevertheless, failed to secure for its authors the individual eminence and national welcome that belonged to the older time. The touch of literature on the public has been mainly, almost exclusively, through magazines, which have determined both its objects of interest and its moulds of expression, leading to a predominance of the brief and the impressionable in kind, and of the versatile in talent. The singleness of aim characteristic of Hawthorne, Emerson, and Longfellow is not found; neither is the element of race or of academic tradition conspicuous.

From another point of view, the cleavage which is thus denoted in many ways

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between the old and the present, while it sets the writers of the last age apart, indicates a closer welding of the literary spirit with the nation, a more perfect union of the people and their writers. This is plain in the realistic and romantic fiction of the latest time, and here and there in some lonely strain of verse. It does not seem, however, that our writers feel the sustaining strength of national life supporting them in anything like the same degree that the old group felt the power of the local cultures of which they were the climax and expression. What our old literature lacked, after all, was power; it is this deficiency that makes it at best only a minor literature, in comparison with the literatures of the large world. The nation was not back of it; only parts and fragments of the nation. The same

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lack of power continues. Timidity was a characteristic of those authors, as has been said, with but one or two exceptions; and this timidity also lasts, and is shown in the rarity of really great ambition or important tasks; we are too content to feed the presses merely. Imitativeness, too, has reached its limits; there is hardly an author of English fame, not to speak of the Continent also, from whom our men of letters, great and small, have not borrowed, sooner or later, in theme, style, and temperament, till sometimes it seems as if American literature were a whispering gallery of the Muses, and little more; in this exhaustion of the secondary method of the academic tradition, we may come back at last to our natural voices and find ourselves after the necessary period of apprenticeship in our art, as English poets,

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who had greatness in them, also did. To be an echo of contemporary London would be too despicable a fate. It is rather for us to return to the old group for such lessons as they can afford us in their devotion to the greatest masters of all the world, in their single-minded and high-aimed art, and in their interpretation of national ideals, and, relying on this larger and more composite people with whom we are more closely blended and fused, to endeavor to give noble expression to the common life and the lofty hope, the breadth and lift of the people, and again to bring from a democracy, enriched with all the cultures of the past and the blood of all races, the flower of art.

To sum up, then, the characteristics that have been made prominent here, our past literature is in the main sec-

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tional, a blossom from the stock of old or young communities in the East and distant West, and deeply indebted to its historic localities for theme, atmosphere, and cast of mind; it also, in its most imaginative phases, enters into the common life of the human spirit, lives in the domain of universal art, and finds a welcome in all Occidental nations as intelligent and warm as is ever vouchsafed to literature out of its own country; and it has achieved this high distinction because of its frank use of the tradition of literature in all Western civilization. It has been controlled by the academic, artistic, and romantic spirit. For our own people it has determined for all time the memory of our historical dawn in the wilderness, its coloring and character, and has preserved the moral and political ideals of that portion of the

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people in whom lay the shaping will of the nation from the formation to the preservation of the Union; whatever the future may have in store, our ideal past, supplemented for a time by history, will subsist in the national consciousness as it is expressed in these authors. Much of the life of the nation in its various divisions found no record, and has perished. This literature seems, and is, inadequate; it bears no fit proportion to the greatness of the nation which swiftly outgrows it. On the other hand, it is supplemented in the life which it so partially feeds by world-literature, and in overwhelming measure by the English, of which we are heirs of time. In this fact of our national life—and perhaps in the practice of our authors also—may be found the foreshadowing of a time when the effect-

